UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Race matters in the life/work of four, white, female teachers

by

©

Merle Laraine M^{c}Kee Kennedy

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Dedication

To Janice, for all encompassing and unconditional support

May the big picture be always in our sight

ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry arose from my work as a classroom teacher with First Nations children. The inquiry echoes the students' questions and comments as they made public and visible my difference, my whiteness. I studied the cultural construction of whiteness through life stories, family stories and stories of classroom practice. Race is the thread I snagged, rather than severed, from the multiple threads that are woven together in identity formation. To explore the cultural construction of whiteness and its interface with classroom practice I asked three, white, female teachers to engage in conversation once a month over an eight month period. My life stories and stories of classroom practice are set alongside the participants' stories. The inquiry makes visible multiple forms of white identity and explores the interface of teachers' raced identities with their classroom practices. Drawing on the participants' stories, I present liminality as a conceptual framework for understanding their teaching practice and as one possibility for the exploration of raced identities in teacher/education.

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Stories move in circles. They don't move in straight lines.
So it helps if you listen in circles.
There are stories inside stories and stories between stories,
and finding your way through them
is as easy and as hard as finding your way home.
And part of the finding is the getting lost.
And when you're lost, you start to look around and to listen.

(Fischer, Greenberg & Newman of a A Travelling Jewish Theatre,
Coming from a Great Distance, in Metzger 1992, p. 49)

DIVERGENCE / DIFFERENCE[1]

racist
whitey
stupid môniyâw
I'm sick of you white people in this school, why don't you go back where you came from
fuckin' racist bitch
white trash fuckin' bitches
students spew from a wellspring of anger

DIFFERENCE / DIVERGENCE

shock, devastation
understanding, respect
fear
discomfort
teachers' emotions evoked from a wellspring of whiteness

DIVERSITY / RACISM

nuanced
complex, contradictory
punctuated with questions
painful
cherished
erupting
sometimes visible, sometimes not
always felt
us and them
other
minority, visible minority, person of color, racist, anti-racist racist
any body, no body, some body, every body

CHAPTER 1

Talking / Reading Race

Dear Reader,

Where to begin, the writer queries? I have imagined several different beginnings for my writing as I work with the data and the questions I am asking. While thinking about the writing process I also hold in my mind's eye, the reader. My thoughts about the reader derail my writing as I revisit the reluctance of individuals to listen to my teaching stories, an experience that has been repeated enough times that I wonder about people's responses to my words. Who is the audience for my writing? I am writing for the same group of people with whom I have attempted to share my stories, educators who are open to the complexity, ambiguity, contradiction, and tension that are enmeshed in educational practice and understand that a multiplicity of educational sights means a multiplicity of understandings about education and teaching from which we can learn. Or so I thought.

Since that has not been my experience I begin my work by addressing those individuals who, as soon as they can identify my teaching practice as being located within a First Nations community or with First Nations[2] children, file my attempts to speak under the heading, 'Doesn't Belong Here.' My narratives, the listener suggests, carry no import except within that community and she or he moves quickly to refer me to someone with a background in First Nations education, that is who you should be talking to the listener opines. How will we learn anything if the only people to whom I am to tell my stories are the people who already know them? For awhile I told the stories differently, I left out the racial identifier because I wanted you to listen, a decontextualized story created so that you would listen. That didn't last, it was not my truth and it was disrespectful of my students.

I am reminded of an earlier experience. A professional development day had given our staff the opportunity to have lunch at a restaurant. The conversation was leisurely and light as we awaited our meals. After some time, a colleague sitting next to me commented on the length of time it was taking for our food to be served; "now you know what it's like to be Indian," she said. Her words are echoed by Taylor (1998, p. 34) who says, "…like any typical Native person in this country, I shouldn't be surprised at blatant racism. As it was once said, 'racism is as Canadian as hockey'." When I tell my stories and explain my research am I in that restaurant again? I wonder upon what foundation your actions are based. Your may think that you are being helpful by referring me to another listener; I interpret your helpfulness as dismissiveness. Why do you intervene so quickly? You haven't heard the story; you have only heard the sentence that serves to contextualize what I am about to say. How would I begin a conversation with you about teaching stories that matter to me? My attempts thus far have not been successful and I continue to wonder if I have missed an important cue. The one cue I am alert to is the agility and speed with which you move from beginning to end, completely avoiding the middle. I am reminded of a stanza from the poem *In Broken Images* by Robert Graves (McWilliam, 1994, p. vi), "He is quick, thinking in clear images; I am slow, thinking in broken images." My desire is to explore the broken images, the stories that have stayed with me because there is something in the story I have yet to understand. Or maybe I have been able to learn from a story and I want to share that with you.

Recently, I was introduced to the work of George Littlechild (1993) and pondered why I found his work so evocative. I began by thinking of him as a storyteller and artist but that creates, for me, a dichotomy that doesn't exist in his work. He has woven together his personal narrative, the historical narrative of the Plains Cree and his artwork in *This Land is my Land.* His use of collage invites me to explore his artwork, to see it from multiple perspectives (geographical, historical, familial, and cultural). A colleague who is a visual artist suggested that perhaps I am seeing for the first time. Pondering this, I think that my ability to see may be rooted in my work in the classroom. My subject position has become clearer, I am awake to the boundaries set by my ethnocentric gaze.

> It is as if I had been looking at a fishbowl–the glide and flick of the golden scales, the green tip, the bolt of white careening back from the gills; the castles at the bottom, surrounded by pebbles and tiny, intricate fronds of green; the barely disturbed water, the flecks of waste and food, the tranquil bubbles traveling to the surface–and suddenly I saw the bowl, the structure that transparently (and invisibly) permits the ordered life it contains to exist in the larger world (Morrison, 1992, p. 17).

As you begin listening to my story, the words may become, for you, the contents of the fishbowl. The words have no impact on you because they are not about you; therefore, it may seem logical to refer me to someone who is involved, firsthand, with the words. What you have missed is the fishbowl itself, the structure that orders our understanding of life inside of it. The fishbowl is a largely invisible, taken for granted, dominant culture and in this study it is wrapped around the education of First Nations children. The fishbowl is as important as its contents.

I am honoured that I mattered enough to my students that they persevered in their examination of both the fishbowl and its contents. From 1990 to 1994 I taught First Nations children both off and on reserve. One class was situated in a midsize city in a kindergarten to grade four school and the other class was situated in a band controlled First Nations kindergarten to grade twelve school. I taught a class labelled behaviour disordered in one teaching assignment and a combined class of grade three and four in the other assignment. While the children are central to my research it is not about them, it is about what they were teaching me through their stories; they were teaching me what it is to be me in their eyes (Lugones, 1987). They wondered about my skin color, the texture of my skin, the size of my home, the vehicle I drove, the lunch I packed, and the composition of my family. They wondered about the language I used because the meaning I ascribed to certain words was different than the meaning they ascribed to those words. They puzzled over some of the assignments they were given, assignments taken from curricula that were sometimes foreign to their ways of knowing. Sometimes they wondered out loud, asking me directly. Sometimes they talked to one another about me. Sometimes, when they took exception or didn't understand, they became angry or burst into laughter. In all of these ways I was given an opportunity to see myself from their perspective as they sought an understanding of the stranger who had arrived in their midst and who they called 'teacher.' The students were asking me to grapple with my culturally constructed identity, specifically my raced identity, my whiteness. My entry into these classrooms marks the end of my invisibility, the end of my silence on questions of race. I was named as white[3] and began to speak, however hesitantly, about my raced identity while at the same time, I listened to the children's stories of being Indian. Extending our conversation, this research becomes a response to the call for whites to examine their raced identities (hooks, 1993; King, 1994; Morrison, 1992, Shadd, 1991) making my body the site of a struggle for meaning.

Our shared stories, in the classroom and in the research, are stories of disruption, tension and ambiguity; stories that are lived out on the borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987; Steedman, 1986; White, 1995). Borderlands exist wherever "two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (Anzaldúa, 1987, Preface). The power of a story from the borderland is that it "cannot be absorbed into the central [story]: it is both its disruption and its essential counterpoint..." (Steedman, 1986, p. 22).

A story of fluoridation serves as an example. Each week I was responsible for supervising the fluoridation of the students' teeth. I remembered doing this for my own children when we, too, lived in the country and drank well water. I decided to ask the class if they knew why they were rinsing, expecting a discussion where I could tell my story of living on an acreage and we could then discuss the pros and cons of using well water. One of the students responded, "because we're Indian." I was taken aback by the response. I spent some time working through that comment with the class but it has stayed with me because it speaks to something deep-seated in that student's understanding of the world. How did it become a part of her story of being Indian?

In the fluoridation story, the student does not need to hear the story I might tell. She immediately speaks her understanding that because fluoridation takes place in the classroom, it is something that is only done to Indians. Her understanding was partially expressed in the resignation with which the words were spoken. Adams (1989), in his book *Prisons of Grass: Canada From a Native Point of View*, states that a First Nations child internalizes an inferior image of his or her "self" because "they are surrounded with white-supremacist ideas and stories–every image glorifies white success" (p. 15). The dental assistant and I embodied that image and we were not fluoridating our teeth. At the time the student's truth was spoken I knew it was deeply entrenched in her being. I wonder if she heard my explanation. As Delpit (1995) points out,

> we all carry worlds in our heads, and those worlds are decidedly different. We educators set out to teach, but how can we reach the worlds of others when we don't even know they exist? Indeed, many of us don't even realize that our own worlds exist only in our heads and in the cultural institutions we have built to support them (p. xiv).

Your unwillingness to listen to my stories stands in contrast to my willingness, however tentative, to listen to the children. I do remember the contradictory emotions of listening and perhaps that's what you are experiencing. I am asking you to enter the same uncharted territory that I did. At those times, I was no longer teacher. I had to become comfortable with giving over control to the students. Nor were the opportunities for exploration planned, they arose when the children had need of an explanation. I could not be prepared in the way I would be prepared for teaching; perhaps it is this feeling of inadequacy I experienced that you want to avoid. Or perhaps you want to avoid the emotional entanglement that takes place when you listen to another's story, for as Lopez

(1990, p. 48) says, '[t]he stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away when they are needed." The children gave me the stories when I needed them and as I look at the world beyond our classroom I know that those stories are needed once again.

Reading Cardinal (1977, p. 16) I have a sense that the children were, in their way, working on "[t]he basic task that remains after three or four centuries of contact between Indians and whites ...construction of a bridge of understanding between two worlds that exist as separate realities." My sense of their work with me is that they embodied a desire to look deeper, to see the whole, to have some sense of the why in their relationship with me. "The preconditions for any inquiry are set by prior inquiries" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 418) and this research is grounded in what I learned and am learning about myself and my teaching practice from the stories the students told and the questions they asked.

The study is an exploration of white, women teachers' culturally constructed identities and their interface with classroom practice. The focus of this study is on the construction of race, specifically whiteness; race is the thread I snagged from the multiple threads that are woven together to create identity. How have the teachers constructed their understanding of race? What are the teachers' experiences of difference in the classroom? How do teachers work with difference in their classrooms? I begin with an explanation of my research methodology followed by my life stories and stories of classroom practice to provide a context for the participants' stories that follow.

Notes

[1] 'Divergence / Difference' is made up of words taken from the conversations of the white, women teachers who participated in the study. Some of what they said is their memory of students' words. I have chosen the title of this work to reflect differing points of view, to acknowledge that there is more than one interpretation of the experience to which 'Divergence / Difference' is referring. The article "Honouring What They Say," (1995) makes the following distinctions.

> The acknowledgement of actual difference is not racism. Just as each individual is unique within his or her cultural group, so is the group they represent different from other groups. This is the principle of *diversity*. Through diversity comes broader understanding and a wider range of views and resources brought to bear on problems. Through diversity there can be greater strength. But diversity differs from *divergence*. The former necessitates a common goal where the latter pulls in

> different directions that can be quite opposite. The greater the divergence, the less shared are the goals. Where diversity is obtained through the exclusion of similarities and rejection of acculturation or assimilation with attendant deficits of information and mutual respect, racist divergence begins (p. 151).

[2] Labelling is problematic. Throughout the document I am labelling students, the participants are labelling students, and sometimes the students are labelling themselves with the terms, First Nations, Indian and Native. The labels used are labels that have been created by the dominant culture, the mainstream or "whitestream" (Halas, 1998, p. 219), not by the groups being named. Wilson and Wilson (1998, p. 157) use the term Native "to refer to all Indigenous groups, whether they be status, non-status, Métis, Canadian, or American" and they explain First Nations as a term "that arose out of constitutional talks in which Indigenous groups in Canada were involved, so it is preferred by most." Statistics Canada (1996) defines Aboriginal as individuals who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, that is, North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit or those who reported being a Treaty Indian, Registered Indian or a member of an Indian Band or First Nation. Calliou (1998) in her article, "Us/Them, Me/You: Who? (Re)Thinking the Binary of First Nations and Non-First Nations" also explores the issue of naming.

[3] Throughout my writing I have not capitalized the 'w' when using the word white or its related forms. Harris (1993), in her article "Whiteness as Property," refers to the use of the upper case and lower case in reference to racial identity as having a particular political history. She explains the use of the lower case 'n' in 'negro' as a way of justifying and defending slavery. She also states that, " 'white' has incorporated Black subordination; 'Black' is not based on domination. 'Black' is naming that is part of counterhegemonic practice" (p. 1710). She provides parallels between the racialization of identity of Blacks and Native Americans for the purposes of slavery and conquest. That parallel could be extended such that 'white' incorporates Native American subordination or, in the Canadian context, First Nations subordination. First Nations may also be naming that is part of counterhegemonic practice. Considering the position she puts forward I use a lower case 'w' when referencing white or its related forms.

Good writing, not enough of it though

I

How to write more, say more
How does one make a body mind?
Cellular knowledge of ease resisting the dis-ease of a writer's posture
Bones and muscles ache, longing for release
Dare I?
Any physical movement an invitation for the matters of my life to intervene
Demands waiting at the periphery of my dis-ease held at bay by textual engagement
Matter over mind, I stretch into that which waits at the periphery
Bones and muscles active, relieved
Good writing, not enough of it though

II

My luteal phase
Consciousness and unconsciousness blur, intuitive knowing predominates
Life / work have overwhelmed the dream time
Recognizing that, how can I transform it?
Hours pass
Thoughts poured onto paper, temporary relief
I sleep with eyes wide shut
Under cover of darkness the scribbled notes held promise
In daylight I struggle to give them meaning
Good writing, not enough of it though

III

Quiet the jumble of thoughts
Focus on breathing-inhalation, exhalation
A flash of stillness, then
Monkey brain, mind game, sensing, feeling, thinking
Crescendo! Monkey brain exploding
Muttering, I lose myself in imagined discourse
Caught by a colleague, we laugh (why the need to apologize?)
Surrendering to the process,
Subservient to my monkey masters, I begin writing

Submission slows me; I catch myself wringing my hands
Blank page, the mind game has been put back in its box
Melancholy
Good writing, not enough of it though

IV

A life of
        Interruption
                                                            Intrusion
              Irruption
Discontinuity
                                                Disruption
Disorder
My context for writing reflected in the words on the page
I am who I am
Good writing, not enough of it though

CHAPTER 2

Narrative Intersections

> *Postmodern multiculturalism may have genuinely opened up a space for the voices of the other, challenging the authority of the white West, but it may also simultaneously function as a side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them. We may be on our way to genuine hybridity, multiplicity without (white) hegemony, and it may be where we want to get to–but we aren't there yet, and we won't get there until we see whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place and end its rule. This is why studying whiteness matters.*
>
> *–Dyer (1997, p. 4)*[1]

Narrative and identity

Named as white, I acknowledged the naming, repeated the words, I am white. What is its meaning? Who am I? How do I understand my whiteness? "Whatever our story is, we must come to know it. It is given to us the way we are given ourselves; it is the source and the record of our identity" (Metzger, 1992, p. 50). I began by wondering about and sometimes answering the children's questions. The simplicity of the questions belied the complexity of my responses. Each conversation with the children began a process of unravelling some tightly knotted thread of my self, facilitating a journey of exploration, an exploration of my self and the social contexts in which I was and am situated.

The threads are still unravelling; it has become a process, a way of being in the world. The unravelling is seen and heard in the stories I tell. Stories are "as much a representation of a culture as…a revelation of a unique individual" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1991, p. 262). I have embodied the cultural constructions of whiteness in the western society in which I live and racism "is part of the cultural non-consciousness that we all inhabit" (Dyer, 1997, p. 7). "To speak of whiteness…is to emphasize that dealing with racism is not merely an option for white people–that, rather, racism shapes white people's lives and identities in a way that is inseparable from facets of daily life" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6). The stories I tell of my life/work that follow this chapter illustrate Frankenberg's point.

The participants shared episodic narratives (Riessman, 1993, p. 17), narratives woven together mainly by theme. The stories told were not linear, organized around time. Rather, we focussed on life stories that informed our exploration of difference, of our raced identities. "The life story is a redescription of the lived life and a means to integrate the aspects of the self" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 154). Life stories can be written, oral, or visual stories that arise from "facets of daily life" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6). Family stories are an important part of life stories. "Family stories seem to persist in importance even when people think of themselves individually, without regard to their familiar roles. The particular human chain we're part of is central to our individual identity" (Stone, 1988, p. 7). For Moore (1992,) "when we talk about family, we are talking about the characters and themes that have woven together to form our identities, which are intricately textured" (p. 29).

Telling stories serves "to claim identities and construct lives" (Riessman, 1993, p. 2), "to put shards of experience together, to (re)construct identity, community, and tradition..." (Casey, 1995, p. 216). Our lives inform stories and our lives are formed by stories (Widdershoven, 1993). "A story is like a lens or a frame: it gives focus, it unifies, it organizes diverse images into a coherent meaning. Without the frame or focus, the events would be random and disconnected. Story provides the relationship, the links, the connections. One of the reasons we tell stories is that the existence and the nature of relationships become clear in the process of telling" (Metzger, 1992, p. 59). As we tell stories we are taking events in our lives and putting them together to create a narrative unity. As we live our lives, we live out those stories.

> In planning our days and our lives we are composing the stories or the dramas we will act out and which will determine the focus of our attention and our endeavors,.... We are constantly explaining ourselves to others. And finally each of us must count himself among his own audience since in

> explaining ourselves to others we are often trying to convince ourselves as well (Carr, 1985, p. 117).

(Re)constructing identity brings together the telling and living of stories. Responses to the stories we tell, the stories we live, shape the retelling and hence the reliving of those stories. It is a circular process, each element, telling, living, retelling, reliving, connected. At the same time, these elements are dependent upon social context, "the plot of the normal self is bound by the episodes and the environment in which a person expresses himself or herself…" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 152). The answer to the question, who am I, comes in the form of a life story, "self-identity becomes linked to a person's life story, which connects up the actions into an integrating plot" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 151).

Stories reside in the mind and the body; the mind and body being inextricably linked (Northrup, 1998; Ackerman, 1990; Johnson, 1987). Stories are told in the language of words and experienced in the language of the body. Stories become memories on the body, cellular memory. For Polkinghorne (1988), "it appears that for the major part of daily life a person's self concept is raised, edited, and implemented preconsciously, at the prelinguistic level of emotion and 'felt' dispositions" (p. 150).

Working with memory on the body, it is possible to tell and live a different story, as the ease of cellular memory becomes dis-ease. Pratt (1991) speaks of "stripping away layer after layer of my false identity; notions of skin, blood, heart based in racism and anti-Semitism…" (p. 61). I understand her words as retelling and reliving, as moving from the ease of cellular memory to the dis-ease of cellular memory. Bateson (1989) writes of reading and writing biography to gain a perspective on one's own life. "Each reading provokes a dialogue of comparison and recognition, a process of memory and articulation that makes one's own experience available as a lens of empathy. We gain even more from comparing notes and trying to understand the choices of our friends" (p. 5). Telling and retelling our stories requires a dialogue, a way of bringing our stories to consciousness. Banks (1997) makes a similar point, "reflecting on their own life journeys–by writing their life stories–can be a powerful tool for helping teachers to gain a better understanding of the ways in which institutionalized conceptions of race, class, and gender have influenced their personal lives" (p. 85). An important part of understanding our stories is creating possibilities for retelling and hence reliving our stories. Both Bateson and Banks write of understanding our stories and it is out of that understanding we can envision other possibilities for telling and living our stories, "the plot of the normal self is bound by the episodes and the environment in which a person expresses himself or herself as well as the projects of the imagination that appear as possibilities extending out from the person's actual history" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 152).

One of the participants explained to me that the research process had helped her to understand her work such that she could now see herself returning to her former teaching position. At the time she left that position she had no intention of returning and, indeed, she may not. What is important is the understanding she constructed of her work such that she could now entertain the possibility.

Teachers' narrative knowledge

Our exploration of difference was situated in our classrooms and stories of classroom practice were an integral part of our conversations, of the life stories we shared. "Personal narratives are not superfluous features of teachers' lives; they are basic to our professional growth" (Jalango, 1993, p. 72). Teaching informs and is formed by stories and those stories are "embedded in [the storyteller's] culture, language, gender, beliefs, and life history" and "this embeddedness lies at the core of the teaching-learning experience" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 3).

It is not possible "to understand ourselves as only a teacher. We are that, but we are many other things as well. Indeed, the kind of teacher that we are reflects the kind of life that we lead" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 27). A teacher's self understanding is expressed in classroom practice and, at the same time, that practice exemplifies a teacher's self understanding. The particular context in which a teacher works creates a time and space for the telling and living of stories and it is at this point, the intersection of a teacher's narrative knowledge with a particular classroom context, that a teacher's identity becomes evident. Connelly and Clandinin (1988, p. 25) use the phrase "personal practical knowledge" to speak of a "teacher's knowing of a classroom…a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions for the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation." A teacher's knowing as expressed in a classroom is a composite of narratives located in the teacher's past, present and future. Personal practical knowledge situates a teacher's knowing in a particular context such that both the narratives told and the understandings constructed are situational, relative to time and space.

The quest for meaning revolves around the questions, Who was I? Who am I? Who am I becoming? While the ontological quest may not be widely recognized, it is a part of narrative knowing. These ontological questions, often unspoken, are questions that are both asked and answered in the stories we tell to construct meaning in our lives. Connelly & Clandinin (1999) identify this ontological quest as one of identity, "teachers seemed more concerned to ask questions of who they are than of what they know" (p. 3). What we know is inextricably linked with who we are and these become our "stories to live by" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4). Stories to live by are what the women in this study explored.

Stories are lived, told, relived and retold to reflect life's fluidity and shifts in understanding.

> The truths of personal narratives are the truths revealed from real positions in the world, through lived experience in social relationships, in the context of passionate beliefs and partisan stands. They recount efforts to grapple with the world in all of its confusion and complexity and with the normal lack of omniscience that characterizes the human condition. It is precisely because of their subjectivity–their rootedness in time, place, and

> personal experience, and their perspective-ridden character that we value them (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, pp. 263-264).

The epistemological claim is one of knowledge as socially and contextually constructed by individuals, "the knower is an intimate part of the known" and is situated in the world "to embrace all the pieces of the self in some ultimate sense of the whole...to deal with life, internal and external, in all its complexity (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 137).

Meeting with the participants

As I invited the participants to join the study, I gave them a copy of my research proposal. I wanted them to have an understanding of the narrative that brought me to this research as well as the questions I was pondering. I was willing to answer any questions that arose out of their reading and then they could choose whether or not to participate in the study. Each one of them decided to participate.

We met one evening a month for three hours from October, 1997 to May, 1998 and engaged in conversation about our life/work. We also enjoyed a meal together since we met from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. We enjoyed each other's company and sometimes participants arrived early and stayed late. The women expressed concern, particularly at our first few meetings, that I was getting what I needed in terms of data and they were always lending a hand with the technical aspects of recording our conversations. I appreciated their support; it helped to alleviate the anxiety I felt as we began our work together. I also appreciated their heartfelt thanks for the suppers we shared. We had interesting conversations about food–funny stories about the origins of the names of cookies, poignant stories about favourite foods prepared by our grandmothers, stories about how we eat and an ongoing conversation, accompanied by laughter, about my recipes.

Amelia: Merle can write this down in her transcribing, the food is wonderful.

AliceAnn: Like make your fortune with your cookbook, research cooking.

Elizabeth: Yeah, why are you wasting your time on this, Merle? (02.09.98)
(See p. 37 for an explanation of transcription referencing.)

Humour was an important part of our conversations. That the participants could see the humour in some of the stories they told is a testament to the positive energy they brought to their work. It also exemplifies their willingness to see beyond the immediate situation, to frame their understanding in a broader context, one that extends beyond the students and themselves.

AliceAnn: I was devastated when a kid called me a bitch, stupid bitch, stupid really hurt.

Elizabeth: My girlfriend got called a really, really fat bitch. She said bitch wasn't so bad, what about the fat?

AliceAnn: A kid told me today, you know you're just a mean, old, crabby lady and I said I'm proud of it. It wasn't going to be devastating anymore (04.06.98).

Our discussions were guided but not limited to life stories that centered on identity and stories of classroom practice related to working with difference in our classrooms. As we began our conversations I said, "I'm interested in stories of teaching practice and life stories that might inform that practice…however the story [of classroom practice] is told it touches on what matters to you…if there are stories that related back to some part of our life history and we want to bring that forward because it helps to explain or understand the story we'll do that" (10.28.97).

Over time each participant told stories that explored race, class, gender, age, (dis)ability, sexual and spiritual identity, as well as stories of classroom practice. Our identities are woven together from multiple threads and while my focus was on the construction of our raced identities, specifically whiteness, I did not want to severe race from the weaving. Therefore, for the purpose of this research I snagged, rather than severed, the thread.

At our first meeting Elizabeth initiated a conversation about their responses to my invitation to participate in the research. She began the conversation by saying, "I came with the idea that there must be something in each one of us that has drawn us here whether it is something that we want to share or it's something we want to find out." AliceAnn replied, "for me, it's just exciting to participate in study, to be involved in the learning and the growth." Amelia spoke of her interest in my use of narrative in writing and how I introduced her to journal writing, "so I find it really neat to be a part of this. I feel, in terms of the approach Merle wants to use that I can competently fit in" (10.28.97). In our conversation of April 6, 1998 Elizabeth spoke again about participating in the research, "I used to worry a lot and wonder a lot and now I really try hard to just accept where I am because…well, like coming here, it was just a bonus, like out of the blue you phoned and I'm going, oh this is bonus time…to just sit and share and listen…" (04.06.98).

I had several reasons for choosing to work with the three participants in my study. They were teaching in classrooms that exemplified the diversity of my own teaching practice. My most recent teaching occurred in classrooms of First Nations students, both off reserve and on reserve. The questions raised during these teaching experiences about my raced identity and its place in my teaching practice have stayed with me and form the basis of this study. One participant taught in a First Nations, band controlled school, another taught in a separate school in a midsize Alberta city located close to a reserve and the third participant taught in a public school in a large Alberta city with a significant First Nations population (based on Statistics Canada data for 1996).

Secondly, I wanted the participants in the study to be about my age, to have similar historical reference points so that we would not have to spend time explaining the events to which we referred. It also provided for personal connections between and amongst one another's stories. An example of this occurred early in our conversations when I made reference to "DP's" (displaced persons) in describing my understanding of how I had constructed my raced identity. While some participants acknowledged they had not heard that word for a long time, all of us knew what it meant and had personal stories to share about our experiences related to that referent. Some participants spoke of experiences with displaced persons; one participant spoke of the experience of being (called) a displaced person. Another time, the discussion centered on the introduction of television. The participants were discussing storytelling in their families and one participant said,

> from my grandparents and my dad particularly and to a degree from my mom I have a great sense of history in what they told. I don't think our talking in our generation is the same. It's not as history laden, possibly because we're not so dependent on oral transmitting where my grandmother's only means of communicating was orally…now we bring in reading, we bring in viewing tv, we bring in going to movies and that entertains where her talking entertained us (11.18.97).

I also chose participants with whom I had taught or studied because narrative inquiry "occurs within relationships among researchers and practitioners, constructed as a caring community" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). The sense of community was only partial as we began the study since the three participants did not know each other. From the beginning they sought out connections to one another and discovered in our first meeting that they had the same number of children. Mothering was always a topic of conversation, before, during and after the tape recording of our conversations. As mothers of teenagers and young adults, there was much we had in common and having a place to share the trials, tribulations and rewards of living with our children was seen as a bonus. Participants continued making connections as evidenced by the following transcript segment, "Well I was reflecting that the three of us, our parents didn't speak English as a first language" (04.06.98). Upon reading a draft of this chapter Amelia noted that her mother's first language was English and it is the only language she speaks. Her comment reinforces the participants' search for connections. The fact that Amelia's father didn't speak English as a first language connects her to the others and the fact that her mother's only language is English did not detract from that connection in our conversations.

The connections were an important counterbalance to the differences amongst the participants. They held strong, differing beliefs on such topics as working with difference in their classrooms, feminism, and spirituality. One participant summed it up this way, "we all have different perspectives and they're all valid and when I take that back to school that has meaning in terms of my kids and it's something that kind of was inherently there for me but it's validated, it's affirmed that you need to view them that way" (04. 06.98). We continue, as a group, to meet sporadically and support one another in our ongoing endeavors.

Working with field texts

Field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) consisted of field notes, tapes, transcripts and yearbooks from the universities we attended. Some of us also brought yearbooks from our high schools and the schools in which we taught. Each one of these field texts told various kinds of stories.

It is both the resonance and the dissonance with each other's stories that fuelled our conversations, that prompted us to say more or add something previously forgotten to the conversation. When a story resonated with another's experience that story would also be shared and then both stories would be enlarged upon. Sometimes this happened spontaneously and sometimes through questioning. At other times the dissonance created by a story would also bring questions and those questions would be contextualized within the other participant's viewpoint. Perhaps, too, there were times when silence was the response. The stories that were told were also responses to the participants' suggested topics for discussion.

Conversations were taped and in between meetings I worked at transcribing the tapes. As the transcripts were completed I took them to our meetings so that the participants had an opportunity to read them and comment on them. When the transcripts were completed, shortly after the completion of our research conversations, I began looking for "patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes either within or across individuals' personal experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 423). What emerged from the conversations are life stories that inform the participants' stories of classroom practice.

Which stories are to be told in the "research text" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994)? Which elements of which stories are included/excluded? My subjectivity is evident in both the framing of the research inquiry and in the selection of stories from the transcripts. The stories that I have chosen reflect my own search for an understanding of what it means to be a white teacher in a classroom of First Nations students. In constructing the research text I focussed on race, how we constructed our raced identities, how our students expressed themselves on the subject of race and how we worked with raced identities in the classroom.

The number of stories that each participant told varied according to the number of research meetings she was able to attend and also according to each participant's comfort level with sharing personal stories. As in any group there are those members who share frequently, those who share less frequently; those members who take time and more than one attempt to express themselves, those who speak succinctly; those members who respond, those who initiate. As one participant said, "well I'm just listening and sometimes I think I want to jump [in] and then I think, no maybe just listen a little more (11.18.97).

When a person talks and that talk is recorded it does not become a written text by virtue of transcription. This point is one I learned while working on an earlier research project. I returned a transcribed tape to an elementary teacher who was a participant in the project on which I was working. She read over the tape and expressed her surprise at the form her transcribed interview had taken. There was little punctuation; her ideas flowed one into the other. We talked briefly about the act of speaking and the act of writing and she said that never again would she tell her class that writing was simply speech written onto paper. The insights about writing that she developed during our work together have stayed with me and as I transcribed the tapes I was reminded once again of her words. We shape our speech and that speech is then shaped into field texts, transcripts, which are then shaped into research texts.

Transcription is an intense process, physical in nature; my body still carries its mark. Transcription is also an interpretive process. Did I hear the speaker correctly? I listen and listen again and again. Sometimes there are other voices in the background; sometimes the speech is interrupted; sometimes the speaker's voice fades; sometimes the speech flows quickly. I capture the pauses and repetitions. I will write a research text from these transcripts but what will it look like?

Listening to the tapes as I transcribed our conversations I heard once again the emotion, joined in the laughter, tensed at the words spoken in frustration, felt at a loss when the tears came. I cannot put these emotions into the transcription other than by a word or two of description, a reminder to me of what transpired within the words. In rereading the transcripts the words that set out emotion seem foreign. They are printed in brackets outside the speech, an act of separation that tells nothing of their origin, life and resolution. Transcripts, like the research text, are disembodied.

The emotive quality of the participants' responses, their anger, hurt, surprise, joy, humour, sadness and resignation, are a necessary part of the whole, of the stories the participants told. This is only partially available to the reader through the written word. At the same time, there is a tension in their work, the tension of difference as it is embodied and lived out. I have a responsibility to shape the spoken word into the written word ever mindful that the written word is not simply speech captured on paper.

I chose to edit the transcripts so that each participant's stories are woven rather than patched together. My editing focusses on such matters as the judicious use of the phrase 'you know', deletion of the repetition of words as ideas are formulated, and deletion of ideas that were expressed for the group's understanding but were not meant for a wider audience. I sometimes changed the punctuation that was inserted during transcription. I altered some of the language such as verb tenses and outside referents in order to weave each woman's stories together from the episodic narratives that were shared in our conversations.

The following two excerpts illustrate our conversations. While they make sense to the women involved, they would not make sense to someone reading them unless that individual possessed the necessary insider knowledge that we had already accrued. This was an important consideration in constructing the research text. "But didn't that probation officer have to check that letter? Like when I have had court ordered letters of apology I had to check them and make sure that they fitted in" (04.06.98). We have already listened to an update of one participant's story of her efforts to make sense of being physically assaulted by students. The participant who is responding worked as a probation officer, we know this from an earlier conversation, and she interjects at this point in the story as a way of providing feedback and support to the participant who is trying to make sense of the judicial handling of her assault.

The next example illustrates how the participants would sometimes begin with a story and, after listening to others' stories, expand upon or further explain the story they had shared earlier. In the transcripts, the response to another participant would include no preamble; we, as listeners, knew the original point of reference. We also were aware of the tone of the words, the emotive component of the response. The following segment of transcription (12.09.97) illustrates the participants' responses to the immediate story, its telling triggered by an earlier story. Within the conversation there is the familiarity of all of the participants with the story that preceded this section of transcript as well as one participant's familiarity with the story being told. There are thoughts partially expressed, thoughts elaborated upon, details clarified, and, as the story is shared, there is an elaboration of the earlier story. One participant draws upon her experience as a parole officer. Something has occurred in the weeks preceding the meeting and it is referred to in a general way, it is not named or described, yet the participants agree to its connection to the stories being told.

Merle: You can't know all that that child carries but an incident like this, do you remember when that student kicked in that plate glass door?

Amelia: Yes.

Merle: I had a student who in absolute rage kicked in, smashed the plate glass door I mean this is a security door,

Amelia: with that wire embedded in it,

Merle: oh yeah, and it was just gone, this door was just gone I mean…

Amelia: and he was only in grade four wasn't he Merle or three?

Merle: three

Amelia: three

Merle: He was in grade three.

AliceAnn: And it wasn't directed at you?

Merle: No, something had happened, it was a playground incident I think or something in the bootroom or in the hallway as he was coming back in that triggered this, but I mean this is a response from where, that's the same as what you're asking where did this come from? And I mean he carried such an anger.

AliceAnn: Yet even when this little boy was telling his foster mother and I said to her, I don't feel it was directed at me I don't feel he was angry at me and she said, you're right. Now usually you know I can pick out the people who are mad at me.

Merle: Yeah, yeah.

AliceAnn: Even when they're not I might feel they are but in this case it was so amazing and so shattering and when I came back the kids were laughing and yucking it up and I said, look I'm shattered when somebody's in so much pain that this is how they react and I'm going to work at my desk quietly for awhile and that's what I want you people to do. Yeah right (laughter).

Merle: Another time when I was teaching I remember an incident like that and they came off the playground and I don't know what had happened they just walked in the room, one of them exploded and he grabbed a baseball bat that was in the room and he went, these are boys in grade four, and he went after the other boy with the baseball bat.

AliceAnn: Oh my god!

Merle: I was terrified not for myself but that something would actually happen and I can still see myself screaming at this other boy, get out of the room get out and I was between them and of course he thought I was mad at him. I just didn't want this to come to anything. So he left the room and ran away which I didn't know at the time and there I was with this other boy swinging this baseball bat around and I had my foot against the door 'cause I didn't want him in the hall, I didn't know what he was going to do. If he was going to do anything, do it to me but I just somehow knew he wouldn't either. Oh it was just awful and he had to do that until he was exhausted from his rage and fortunately there were no windows in this room there was only one window up high. He tried to get to it but you have to get on a desk and you have to crawl up the wall.

AliceAnn: Pretty tough when you're really angry.

Merle: So he was literally caught in this room. I couldn't stop crying, I was over I was tired anyway but I couldn't stop, I was just spent.

AliceAnn: If I had had to talk to any more kids like I was as close to crying in a class as I've ever come and...

Merle: And I know that a part of that rage is related to race but I don't...I don't know all that it is and I worry. I mean what can I do? That was at the end of the year but I worry too because that's the rage that comes out when you're older in more public ways and then you're charged, you're charged with assault, you end up in jail for that.

AliceAnn: Well it's like he couldn't, he wouldn't go to jail, he would get community service for it but the parents would be within their rights to press charges.

Merle: Yes, yes that's assault isn't it?

AliceAnn: It is, It's no question and you know you understand the pain and all those things and I felt dreadful for the boy who was being awful to the little girl like, no matter what, you don't deserve that and you don't want her ever to think that she would deserve…

Merle: No, exactly.

AliceAnn: a hit upside the head.

Merle: Especially after all this city's been through in the last few weeks.

AliceAnn: Can you believe it? One after another.

What was self-evident in conversation is not self-evident to the outside reader of a few pages of transcript. Therefore, part of the interpretive process is to weave together the multiple responses so that each participant feels that they have been heard in the fullest way, that I have presented a holistic sense of each woman's story.

Constructing a research text: (re)presenting stories

Our conversations revolved around multiple facets of identity and in snagging race, rather than severing it, from the women's identities I believe that a more holistic picture of each woman's 'self' emerged in our conversations. A part of constructing the research text from the field texts was bringing together the life stories and the stories of classroom practice. The participants knew that my research interest was centered on an exploration of whiteness based on stories of teaching practice and the life stories that might inform that practice so from time to time the connection between stories was made explicit by the participants themselves, sometimes in a self-reflective component contained within their stories. However they made the connection it reinforced, for me, the importance of those particular stories for the research text. For example, one participant said, "I sort of go from something that my dad told me a long time ago, maybe from those stories…" (11.18.97). Later, she gave voice to a memory on her body. As she said,

> It's funny how things never leave you and how you get drawn into conversation, like when you started to talk about race. It's distant from me. I'm fine, I was ok sitting there and I'm categorizing where it's supposed to fit in relationship to me and then we hear DP [displaced person] and I'm sitting right up there because the pain, I think, that a person goes through is incredible. I have gone through an awful lot of pain. I'm glad that I'm able to be at a place where I can talk about it and try make some sense out of it (11.18.97).

Another participant told a story of teaching in West Africa because of its memory on her body and the part it plays in her current teaching practice.

> I was doing the comments on his report card and I wrote, this boy's a comedian. Didn't think a thing of it, not a thought. When I came back from the long Christmas vacation he said, oh Miss you never should have written that. I said, what? He said, about the comedian; they took me in a room and they tied me on a table and they beat me…I don't like to leave things too last minute in school because I'm very scattered and I'd be to the very last minute [preparing report cards] and I'd always think of this boy but I didn't make the connection. I'm terrified and we have to do narratives now…I feel that you have an obligation to be specific, on the other hand, what if I make a mistake? I mean, it's terrible (10.28.97).

Sometimes the connection between the life stories and the stories of classroom practice was one I understood as memory on the body. Our memories are stored throughout our bodies, in muscles, in organs, and in other tissues. This information, "like the submerged portion of the iceberg, is not generally recognized by the part of the iceberg on the surface, our conscious intellect. Our cells contain our memory banks–even when the conscious mind is not aware of them and actually battles to deny them!" (Northrup, 1998, p. 38). What has been embodied in childhood lies in our cells and when we speak of the unconscious as a guide I think of it as our cellular memory. When I made the connection between and amongst stories I was looking for a theme that echoed across the stories. For example, was the life story that was told one that exemplified the theme of feeling alone? If so, was this theme echoed in a story of teaching practice? If the story told was one of a participant's spirituality, I looked for the living out of that spirituality in the stories of classroom practice. When the participants made the connections between their stories of classroom practice and their life stories that reinforced the importance of those stories. After the stories were connected I explored their meaning in the cultural context in which they are situated.

Once I connected the life stories and stories of classroom practice in the transcripts I wondered how I might weave episodic narratives into a story? So that my body/mind could feel/sense/think about what it means for me to use a weaving metaphor, a page of transcript became the warp and another one became the woof and I began weaving, literally. I condensed several pages of transcript into two pages by reducing the font size. This eliminated much of the white space and created pages that were dense with words so that the eye would see that I was weaving words together. Leaving a one inch border around the page I cut the centre of the page into strips or threads to create the warp, just as one would place wool lengthwise on a loom in order to begin weaving. I cut the second page into individual strips or threads to create the woof and these threads were then woven into the warp I had created with the first page of transcription.

I soon become mindful of loose ends, uneven tension, and gaps. My hands sometimes ached as I tried to move each thread into what I considered to be the right position. If it worked at all it only worked temporarily. Soon the mass of the weaving, the taut inner portion, would force the outer edges to bow and the uneven tension would again create gaps in the weaving. The loose ends of each thread began to curl, the words moving sideways of their own volition. Correcting the tension and moving threads back into position made me wary, how much force would be enough? Too much force would tear the thread and then I wondered what would replace it or, indeed, if it could be replaced. I was especially careful so that this scenario never became a reality. Were the threads being positioned where they belonged in the weaving? I often found myself wholly engaged with the rhythm of weaving, manipulating the warp, up weave under–down weave over, and only after the fact would I check to see that the thread had been woven in correctly. Correctly meant that the words could be read from left to right and top to bottom. If I was not focussed I would err and then the thread would have to be removed from the weaving. This, I discovered, was an easy process; a tug at the loose end was all that was needed. The difficulty arose when I tried to reweave it. The thread had already been shaped by its original position in the weaving so it resisted my effort. This was the only time that I needed to use something besides my hands to weave the threads together.

I introduced a 'foreign' thread (foreign in texture and colour) to symbolize the external interventions I experienced as I tried to weave together the participants' stories. The interventions were varied, sometimes subtle and sometimes not so, and arose outside of the research conversations themselves. The interventions were both personal and professional in nature. The weaving of the 'foreign' thread created a friction with the warp of the weaving that, unless I was careful, would shred the vertical threads. Removing the 'foreign' thread would have the same effect. It also required more space than I had anticipated and its shape and texture resisted positioning close to the other threads. This kinesthetic experience became the basis for my writing, for weaving together the participants' stories that follow.

I am the primary interpreter of the participants' narratives. The subjectivity of the undertaking is evident; the participants' words are the vehicle by which I enlarge upon my 'self' understanding. My writing exemplifies what I am figuring out about my work and myself and it is set in the context of their words. It is also set in the context of their support, their willingness to work through this process with me. My narrative, then, is an (in)visible thread in the weaving together of their stories.

I am storyteller, editor and interpreter as I create a research text. In relation to writing, Richardson (1997, p. 91) says, "[t]here is no such thing as 'getting it right'; only 'getting it' differently contoured and nuanced." How I, the text's writer, am situated, in history and in the present, forms the text's contours; its outline is formed by the questions I ask and the way in which I frame the responses. In the hands of another, the contours and nuances would be different. It is my body/mind that has guided the weaving of the participants' narratives. The words themselves remind me that I am the weaver of this research text as they resist, ever so slightly, my efforts to have them lie flat on the page, to conform completely to the contours of the text that I have set out for them. Once the contours of the research text are recognized, then the nuances, more subtle in nature, become evident. They are seen in the variations on the page, the gentle curves at the centre of the page, the irregular gaps as the eye moves away from the centre, the loose threads that sit just beyond the edges of the weaving curling gently towards the weaving's centre as if to frame the contours. All of this has been wrought by my hand; the contours and nuances are unique to my weaving. It is my hands that have prepared the threads and woven them together. "Like wet clay, it [material] can be shaped and reshaped" (Richardson, p. 93). What you are reading is the way that I have shaped the field texts into a research text.

Reading the research text

What is important to me as you read their stories is that the stories be kept whole, that the words of the speaker remain in the context in which they are spoken. Participants' knowing, as represented in the research text, is partial and situational and to remove words from their context is to make them meaningless. The emotions evoked are specific to the time and place of the story. Words, then, hold meaning in the context in which they spoken, not outside the context. For example, in one story Elizabeth says, "so I called him out and I tore a strip off him." The student responded, "you don't live where I live and you can't talk to me like that." She replied, "oh but I can. I don't live there but I can talk to you any way I want to" (04.06.98). This exchange, taken out of context, could be read as an affront to the student, the teacher speaking from a position of power to a powerless student. This partial text does not bear witness to her frustration with the student's lack of respect for his cultural heritage nor the community's support for her efforts to work with this student. During our meetings together I heard the emotion that accompanied the participants' teaching practice, the thoughtful caring they brought to their classrooms. I can only imagine the emotion they experienced in living out the stories they told. This is one story that hints at the emotion involved in Elizabeth's teaching practice and it is an emotional quality that the student understood because when the student returned to class he did engage in conversation with Elizabeth about what had transpired. He understood, having lived the story with her, the emotional tone in her response as one of both frustration and caring.

Stories have multiple interpretations and what you, the reader, connect to in a story may be different than that with which I connect.

> The story of a life is less than the actual life, because the story told is selective, partial, contextually constructed and because the life is not yet over. But the story of a life is also more than the life, the contours and meanings allegorically extending to others, others seeing themselves, knowing themselves through another's life story, re-visioning their own, arriving where they started and knowing "the place for the first time" (Richardson, 1997, p.6).

Our response to a story tells us more about ourselves than it does about the person telling the story. Our reading activates our memories on the body and it is to that body/mind response that we need to pay attention.

> …the central imaginary for "validity" for postmodernist texts is…the crystal, which contains symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter but are not amorphous…. Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know (Richardson, 1997, p. 92).

You, the reader, will have your own "angles of approach" to the stories. It is my hope that reading the research text facilitates both believing and doubting as you connect, in your own way, with the stories.

Each participant's story is set out in the same manner. The words of the poetic introduction and the subtitles of the chapter are taken from the participants' words. Each chapter (4, 5, 6) begins with a brief introduction to the woman whose stories are being (re)presented. Following that, the stories are set out in the same format. A story of classroom practice is set out and woven into the classroom story are life stories related to race. The latter stories are set in italics. When the stories have been woven together there appears a line like the one that follows, ∞∞∞∞∞∞∞, and after that is my telling of the stories. It is here that I may make reference, if necessary, to the context in which the story was told. Because the episodic narratives were told over the course of our eight meetings the referencing in the stories is not linear in nature. A story was told and then sometimes elaborated on at a later meeting, retold in the context of another's story or referenced in the telling of a new story. These are the pieces with which I was working and they have come together in a way that presents the story as holistically as possible rather than according to the timeline of our meetings. The data taken from the transcripts of our conversations is referenced as to the date of the conversation. Following the quotes from the transcripts you will find one of the following references.

10.28.97 refers to transcript #1, which took place on October 28th, 1997.
11.18.97 refers to transcript #2, which took place on November 18th, 1997.
12.09.97 refers to transcript #3, which took place on December 9th, 1997.
01.12.98 refers to transcript #4, which took place on January 12th, 1998.
02.09.98 refers to transcript #5, which took place on February 9th, 1998.
03.09.98 refers to transcript #6, which took place on March 9th, 1998.
04.06.98 refers to transcript #7, which took place on April 6th, 1998.
05.11.98 refers to transcript #8, which took place on May 11th, 1998.

My stories are set out in the next chapter. My life stories, as they relate to race, begin the chapter and set a context for my stories of classroom practice. I acknowledge my subjectivity and my own narrative, which follows, will give you, the reader, a sense of that subjectivity.

Notes

[1] In 1971 the Canadian parliament enacted the official policy of multiculturalism. In 1997, Bannerji writes, of being in limbo, living as a Canadian citizen and yet remaining an immigrant.

> Canada then cannot be taken as a given. It is obviously a construction, a set of representations, embodying certain types of political and cultural communities and their operations. These communities were themselves constructed in agreement with certain ideas regarding skin color, history, language (English/French) and other cultural signifiers–all of which may be subsumed under the ideological category ‘White’…Europeanness as ‘whiteness’ thus translates into ‘Canada’ and provides it with its ‘imagined community’ ” (p.24).

The existence of an official policy of multiculturalism, then, does not somehow subsume a discussion on whiteness in this country. An interpretation of Dyer’s quote within First Nations communities might be based on the unique position they claim in this country, that of first nations. Such a claim exists outside of the multicultural framework established in 1971. A First Nations reader of Dyer’s text may interpret “multiplicity without (white) hegemony” as the establishment of self-governing First Nations within Canada. That point of view would support Dyer’s (1997) claim that we need to “see whiteness, its power its particularity and limitedness…put it in its place and end its rule” (p. 4). First Nations communities have an historical understanding of Dyer’s words

Difference / ecnereffiD

Invisible	Visible
Teacher	Students
Privately naming	Publicly naming
Resonance	Dissonance
What is common?	What is different?
Avoiding difference	Exploring difference
Discomfort	Curiosity
Unfamiliar, dangerous territory	A place of exploration

Yes, I am white

Spaces merging

Questions asked

Questions answered

Questions remaining

CHAPTER 3

A White World: My Narratives of Identity and Classroom Practice

> *The present tense of the verb* to be *refers only to the present; but nevertheless, with the first person singular in front of it, it absorbs the past which is inseparable from the pronoun.* I am *includes all that has made me so. It is more than a statement of fact:...it is already autobiographical.*
>
> *–Berger (1972, pp. 46-47)*

The composition of the narratives in this chapter began in the classrooms in which I taught and before that in the taken for granted of my everyday life. The narratives bring together those two elements to create a picture, however partial, on which to reflect. "The process of rereading one's work and situating it in historical and biographical contexts reveals old story lines, many of which may not have been articulated....Writing stories about our 'texts' is thus a way of making sense of and changing our lives" (Richardson, 1997, p. 5). The stories also provide a context for reading the participants' narratives that follow. I have used excerpts from the transcripts as well as other stories I wrote in preparing to do this research. In the stories in this chapter, my reflections are a part of the story itself.

I begin with an excerpt from the transcripts, one which reveals my colour blindness, "a mode of thinking about race organized around an effort to not 'see,' or at any rate not to acknowledge, race differences..." (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 142). It had been the participants' suggestion that we look through our yearbooks to get a sense of the raced identities in the classrooms where we went to school and where we taught. The suggestion followed upon a discussion regarding the composition of those classrooms in comparison to the ones of today, the ones our children were attending and the ones in which we had recently taught or were currently teaching. We suspected that we would find homogenous classrooms in our yearbooks as compared to the heterogeneous classrooms of today. That's not what I found as I looked back. "What really got me was looking back [in the yearbook] to when I started teaching and not even remembering that I had students of colour in my classroom.... If you would have asked me I would have said I had no visible minority students" (03.09.98).

Beginning to teach marks a pivotal point in my life story. What came before shaped how I looked at my students and what I saw. I had grown up invisible, a part of the white, Anglo-Saxon majority. What developed through my teaching was my peripheral vision and with that came my own visibility. In listening to the research participants I commented that, "your understanding of race and ethnicity brings you to the classroom in a very different way than it brings me. I didn't have the same understanding when I came to the work and for me it was really more of hitting a wall, knowing I wanted to work there because I appreciate the questioning that comes with difference, it's vital, but at the same time not knowing fully what that would entail and a lot of that, for me, was self-examination" (11.18.97).

Childhood memories

I listened intently to the research participants telling their families' stories. Alice Ann spoke of "family lore" (11.18.97), stories passed from one generation to the next. For her, the table is a symbol of family because storytelling took place around the kitchen table. Both Alice Ann and Amelia talked about stories creating vivid pictures and becoming 'real' to the listener. Elizabeth spoke of stories told by her grandmother that offered moral lessons (11.18.97). This was not my experience. There was no sustained storytelling in my family, no family stories passed from generation to generation, "we don't have that sense of coming from some place, we are just here...that's how we've been storied...we don't have that rich history" (11.18.97). Reading *Small Ceremonies* (Shields, 1976) I came upon words that resonate with my experience.

> ...I am from a bleak non-storytelling family (p. 45). My sister Charleen, who is a poet, believes that we two sisters turned to literature out of simple malnutrition. Our own lives just weren't enough, she explains. We

> were underfed, undernourished; we were desperate. So we dug in. And here we are, all these years later, still digging (p. 47).

I, too, am still digging in. I can remember trying to do a family history and my paternal grandfather saying, don't look back too far. His joke was that if I looked back too far I might find a thief. He didn't seem interested in delving into the past. I wonder now if that was deliberate, if it was his way of making his family Canadian.

Photographs are my connection to my family's past. My maternal grandmother had a plethora of family pictures on her walls and in her albums. She was steeped in family relations and took pleasure in bringing out the pictures and explaining who was who and how they were related to her. "I remember as a child being interested for awhile and then it went over my head..." (11.18.97), as Grandma talked, I would no longer be listening. Perhaps our sharing went on too long, perhaps I wanted another honey sandwich, I do not remember what distracted me.

I revisited one of those photo albums, the one willed to me by my grandmother. Its pages are full of memories and mysteries. The memories ground me, remind me of who I am. Looking through her photo album, I feel again the comfort of my grandparents' home. I can even smell the camphor. The mysteries, the pictures and clippings I cannot identify, intrigue me. These, too, represent something of who I am yet the connections elude me. With the photo album in front of me, I am drawn into a circle of family. The pictures help to situate me in time and space and they create a web of relationships. Yet, I do not know the stories that accompany the pictures and I cannot answer the questions my children ask about their family history.

Years ago our family attended a heritage festival and my younger daughter asked, who are we, where are we, because she couldn't find herself [represented] there. We don't have that sense of coming from some place, we are just here. It was an honest question on her part and there was no answer (11.18.97). I collected snippets of family history over the years, enough to answer census questions but not enough to sustain a story. So I know that my paternal grandparents came from Scotland and England to settle in Manitoba and my maternal grandparents came from Ontario and Nova Scotia to settle in Alberta. They too have Anglo-Saxon backgrounds with the addition of my grandmother's mother who was Dutch. I am intrigued by what I don't know, the stories that were never told.

The invisible child

> …the institutional design of whiteness, like the production of all colors, creates an organizational *discourse* of race and a personal *embodiment* of race, affecting perceptions of Self and Others, producing individuals' sense of racial "identities" and collective experiences of racial "tensions," even coalitions (Fine, 1997, p. 58).

Growing up, I was never identified and named like the displaced persons who moved into our neighbourhood after the war. They were called DP's. They were white but their difference, their ethnicity, was noted. Another important marker in the community in which I grew up was religion. It wasn't that it made a difference in the day to day activities of the children in the neighbourhood but we knew who was Catholic and who was Protestant.

I had never given any thought to who I was racially or ethnically until the displaced persons moved into our community. It was through the portrayal of them as 'other' that I learned something about myself. I learned that I was not like them; some of their practices were questioned and I knew, implicitly, that my life was the comparative norm.

Invisibility marked my childhood. As one of the research participants said to me, "you didn't have to [think about who you were], you were it" (11.18.97). Her words succinctly measure the success my family might say they achieved in the span of two generations.

The invisibility that I embodied as a child grew complicated during adolescence. It was made partially visible by class distinctions. I grew up with the smell of oil. Depending on which way the wind was blowing, it often enveloped our house. My father brought the smell into our home when he returned from his shift at an oil refinery. I do not remember it as an unpleasant smell. It belonged to the sense of order and discipline that left the house each day with my father and returned with him at the end of his shift. The smell represented that which regulated our lives and set the times when we could play freely about the house, have our meals and celebrate holidays. You couldn't reach my home without smelling oil as you passed another, nearby refinery. The smell of oil set boundaries around my neighbourhood, you knew when you were close to home and when you had finally left. It worked in much the same way as the river to set my neighbourhood apart from the rest of the city. We attended a high school in the central part of the city and the bus ride there took us through this invisible, smelly boundary and then over the river.

The fathers of a group of my fellow high school students were American oil executives brought to the city to oversee the growing oil industry. There were other students in high school but, in my mind, these students dominated. They set the standards of what was acceptable and, therefore, who was acceptable. They weren't unkind but, sure of themselves and their place in the world, they remained aloof. I wanted what they had–the downfilled ski jackets, seal skin boots, baubles brought back from trips to exotic locations, and the air of certainty that accompanied their position in the world.

The power they held was enacted through their ways of talking, dressing, and interacting (Delpit, 1995) and I learned that my place in the larger world did not encompass the same enactments of power. For the first time I had become visible and it set me apart. Class distinctions now overrode the ethnic distinctions with which I was familiar and I was set within the realm of those who were 'other.' The experience taught me that invisibility was sustained by a middle class existence. I came to see the smelly, invisible boundary as a barrier that separated me from what I desired. I became a teacher, in part, to regain my invisibility. I was successful and it wasn't until I re-entered the teaching profession that my invisibility was again challenged.

What's in a name?

When I re-entered teaching in 1990 I worked with children who referred to themselves as Indian. Hampton (1993) highlights the importance of this self-reference, "the right of a people to define themselves and choose their own name is basic" (p. 261). The children's use of this name held meaning for them. Taylor (1998) points out that, "growing up in school, all of us were proud to be 'Indians.' It had a certain power to it that set us aside from all the White kids…" (p. 64).

I have never been comfortable using the term Indian because I learned, as a child, what it meant when someone was called that, the reference usually included derogatory adjectives and the phrase would be used indiscriminately to describe anyone on the street who fit the viewer's description. The Indian Village, part of an annual summer exhibition, provided a contrast but the reinforcement of historical stereotypes did little to educate an urban population who continued to perceive 'other' as stranger. This is the sense of Indian that I carried into the classroom.

I wonder, then, about the difficulty I experienced, if that's how they named and talked about themselves, why couldn't I? When the children named themselves as Indian they were moving naming into the public domain. I was being engaged in a way in which I had no experience. I had grown up colour blind. When others were named it was done in conversations I considered private. The tension these words evoke speaks to the degree to which race was an issue in my life. Now the 'others' were naming themselves and engaging me in conversation. I considered this naming a move from the private domain to the public domain. I found it difficult to partake in the activity and I did not know how to begin a conversation on the topic. At the time, I could only feel rather than name my hesitancy. Another explanation came from one of the research participants who suggested to me that,

> a community might decide amongst themselves to use some terms [and] it may be a little presumptuous for someone else to come in and make themselves at home…it's like being new kid on the block, you have to be careful. I think that might be a large part of it (11.18.97).

I think that a part of my response was related to being the new, white person at the school. The children had learned to work with complex and sometimes contradictory ideas in ways that I had not. They understood themselves in the context of their own community and the larger community surrounding them. I did not. It was in high school that I became 'other' defined by the name of the bus I rode to and from school each day. Rather than working with the contradictions as the children did, I left them behind. My action was based, in part, on the colour of my skin, my invisibility was ensured. Over time I have, once again, become comfortable with that naming, it roots me in time and space. It is a place to return to for it sustains me now as it did when I was a child.

Other understandings of race were developed from the unspoken, the taken for granted in my family. We had family friends outside of the community in which we lived who were Chinese. They were family friends, not family friends who were Chinese. The issue of naming was not important in that situation, indeed, I only remember it being addressed in the stories my mother related about the difficulties her friend experienced because of who she was. As lifelong friends, they modelled a way of being in the world for both of their families.

Our home contained a basement suite and it was my mother who took responsibility for showing and renting the suite. As I recall we usually rented it out to people we knew, someone's son or a neighbour waiting for a house to be built. I'm sure there were strangers who rented it too but I have only one recollection of that. I returned home from school one day to have my mother tell me that she had shown the suite and the family seemed to be suitable renters. Yet there was a dilemma; she didn't know what to do because, as she said, "the family was Negro." If they came back and wanted to rent the suite, what would she do? This was one of the few occasions I heard her label anyone and it was the naming itself that tacitly underscored her dilemma. Her dilemma was created, I think, by her desire to maintain her invisibility in the community and, at the same time, acknowledge and act on her deeply felt moral principles. If she did rent to them she would make herself visible and hence a target, along with that family, of others in the community. She was relieved they didn't come back, they found something else and they never came back (10.28.97).

Naming sets people apart, it marks their visibility within the community. For my family, I think, naming or labelling was accompanied by the possibility of becoming a part of that process and hence, becoming visible. Growing up, I learned that if someone was to be named it was done in private, like my father's admonitions and humour which sometimes contained racial markers.

My elder daughter recently recalled a childhood experience. As an adult she still could not make sense of an incident that happened when she was a preschooler and so she asked me about it. She was remembering the time we were shopping in a grocery store and she had asked, "why is that man burnt?" The question was asked in reference to a man whom we had passed in the aisle. My response was to whisk her into the shopping cart and move out of his range of hearing before I addressed her question. The man wasn't burnt, he was black and I couldn't speak that publicly. I now know that I carried in my cells an understanding of invisibility and silence about race that both determined and propelled my actions.

I happily accepted the teaching positions about which I write. I was eager to work and looked forward to the questioning that would come with difference. At the time, I didn't fully understand what that would entail. As the white teacher in the classroom I was now positioned as 'other' and I had had no sustained experience of being 'other' nor did I have experience with discussions about race in the public domain. My invisibility would soon disappear and the silence would soon became a cacophony of unfamiliar statements and questions.

You are white

"My mother says you are white," commented Joshua one day when he and I were alone in the classroom. His voice caught my attention, it carried a disparaging tone but it was not until I had worked with the class for several months that I came to understand the full meaning of the word 'white' for these students and the pejorative connotation it carried. I was taken aback at this naming and replied, "Yes, I am white." This was one of several experiences I had of being named as 'white'. "You should eat more moose meat," he told me. "No matter how much moose meat I eat I will always be white," I responded.

Joshua wanted a teacher who was like him, a teacher who was Indian. At the same time I think he was expressing a regard/concern for me in his attempt to make me that teacher. I do not know the substance of the conversation between Joshua and his mother but one outcome of that conversation for Joshua was the realization of our difference. I was not like him, I was white. Perhaps it was in our conflict that I was named white because this naming gave him a way of understanding my actions. For me, the most important point of this conversation and the one that helps to mark the beginning of this research journey is the public acknowledgement of my whiteness, of saying out loud, "I am white."

Other students called me a stupid môniyâw (white person). I was new to them and we weren't in any kind of relation, we were just starting out together so I understood it as a kind of generalized attack; I mean, who was I in that situation? I was another white person, one of many who travel in and out of the children's lives so perhaps, in their minds, I fit their generic image of white people. They've shared some of their experiences with me; they've experienced so much racism in their lives (11.18.97).

I remember our year end field trip to the zoo and the eagerness with which they awaited the train ride around the park. The drizzle couldn't dampen their excitement. We lined up and watched the train roll into and out of the station. I cannot remember the words but I can remember the feeling of what happened next. Another class, about the same age, was riding the train and several of the students hurled racial epithets our way. It is a powerful memory on my body; emotionally wrenching to remember even now–the vulnerability of the children at that moment, excitement replaced with shock and a hurt that no one can make go away. I waited until the offending students disembarked and spoke to their teacher but, then and now, that seems to me to be such a futile gesture. This same incident is repeated, in various ways, over and over again in the children's lives and becomes a powerful memory on their bodies. So when they meet me or any other white person we can only be what they know, a stupid môniyâw, and the responsibility was mine to show them differently.

Slowly and persistently the children examined the world in my head and each time they did so a piece of me was made visible. For me, each piece was something uncovered, something hitherto taken for granted. I held on to each piece, comparing it to what the children were telling me and when it was time to move on finding that I could not put the piece back in its place. It no longer fit. The following stories about food and family illustrate some of the pieces the children and I studied.

Food for all

The lessons I learned about food from my parents were lessons they themselves learned growing up during the Depression. You save everything; leftovers were a regular staple and you waste nothing, always clean up your plate. I never went without, I may not have liked a meal but there was always a meal for me. The world I had created in my head was a world of material plenty and this is the world from which I made decisions. A morning snack was provided for all of the children and a lunch program operated on a daily basis for those who needed it. Food was also a part of our curriculum. I brought different foods for the children to sample, foods such as sweet potato and coconut that had been introduced to the children in the stories we read. On other occasions food was a part of our celebrations and sometimes we prepared and shared a snack or a meal. A part of the learning on these occasions centered on the etiquette of distributing and sharing the food. What I named as an issue of etiquette masked a deeper and disturbing issue associated with poverty, food anxiety (Waxman, 1983).

The availability of food within the school did not rupture my understanding of material plenty because there was enough food for everyone. For some of the children this was only true at school. It is the children's persistence that stayed with me, their continual negotiation with me about the extra/leftover food. Their persistence represents an expertise that I did not have; they had learned to negotiate in different worlds through their experience of "borderland" (Anzaldúa, 1987) travel. I had not. The children knew what they wanted and needed and they worked with me until they were able to get that. In this case, it was the leftover food. They heard what I had to say about sharing and they respected and worked with that but at the same time there was more at stake for them. Their negotiation for the extra/leftover food required them to understand my side of the border, my thinking on the subject. I am sure there were other times in their experience of borderland travel when they negotiated in order to make their way in the world we shared. I knew the territory in which I lived, I embodied its cultural understandings. Seeing with their eyes and engaging, however marginally, in borderland travel reshaped this piece of my world; its edges becoming rougher so that it caught the taken for granted of my understanding.

How many kids do you have?

Over time one of my daughters and my father and mother visited my classroom and/or partook in various school activities. The children were exemplary hosts and enjoyed spending time with my family. Their visits helped to make visible my understanding of family and, when the children compared this to their own understanding of family, questions arose.

They wondered why I have only two children. That's a question, that even when I try and give some kind of a response, I find a bit awkward. I only have a sister and brother and that's really worrisome for them [too]. If you talk about values, about what is valued, I'm thinking there is such a value on family there. In our society I would say we value the individual and what the individual accomplishes and they live in a culture that values, I think, puts a high value on family. So it creates a clash in our conversation because I think that they like me and so they think that I should have what they value the most and I don't have it in their eyes. I just don't have it and I should and that means more of my own children, it means more brothers and sisters and it does mean grandchildren (10.28.97).

Once examined, this piece of me could be put back in its place but it was a loose fit. Under examination, it had shrunk. I didn't feel so sure about the decisions I had made and wondered what it would be like to live with the support of an extended family.

The imaginary door

The children wanted to be in my space, with me all the time. They didn't have a sense of my boundaries. I can remember putting masking tape on the floor around my desk and it became an imaginary door. They loved it. They had to knock to come in because they had no sense that I might feel a bit crowded. They always wanted to be so close to me and I know for other people that's not an issue but it is an issue for me (10.28.97).

When we say that the children don't have the boundaries that we do, we are reading [the relationship] from where we're positioned. We don't understand how they understand. That's an important piece of information but I assumed to know it from where I stood and so told the story of their boundaries from my perspective (10.28.97).

I created a space for myself in the classroom and the children happily consented to the creation of that space for me. What about their space? They seemed happy enough in the classroom but now I wonder. Were they happy because the space suited them? Or could they function in that space because of their ability to negotiate in different worlds through their experience of borderland travel (Anzaldúa, 1987)?

(mis) communication

Communicating with parents was an important part of my teaching, "[what] informed much of my teaching practice was how I was treated, how I was seen as a parent, what my involvement was as a parent.... I wanted to make sure parents didn't feel like I did..." (12.09.97). In relation to my daughters' education, there were teachers who listened to me and there were teachers who were simply going through the motions and the disregard I experienced bordered, at times, on contempt. The experience fuelled my efforts as a teacher to include the children's parents in classroom matters. As I began communicating with parents, I learned from the children to question my approach.

In our first research conversation, October 28, 1997, one of the participants shared a story about the comments she had written on a student's report card and the fall out from what she had written. Her story triggered my memory. I said to a student, I'm going to have to call your mom. It wouldn't be the first time that I had called this student's home and I remember him saying to me, please don't, I'll get beaten. It was just something in the way he spoke that made me pay attention to what he was saying and I didn't call his home. I've often thought about that. I don't necessarily know how families understand education, or the importance they put on it, or the importance they put on my words. It was never my intention in the times previous that I'd called his home [to have him physically punished]. It was to communicate with his parents about what was happening in the classroom and it was for us to be working together. I was not asking them to discipline him so that I'll never have to deal with the issue again. But again, what I'm drawing on is my own experience of how a teacher, a student and the student's parents might work together on something and maybe they are too but our experiences are different. After that I always thought twice before I called a child's home. I questioned how I would say what I needed to say and also, if I really needed to make the call. I wondered if I could wait until we're having a conversation [in school] and put more into it than just this particular incident. In a sense, how naive of me to assume that any communication from me would be received as I had intended it to be received (10.28.97).

Just before the Christmas break, I delivered a hamper to the family of one of my students; he and I loaded my truck together and, on the way to his house, chatted about the problems I was having with my vehicle and what he had been doing the night before with his brother and his brother's friend. The conversation continued as we dropped off the hamper and headed to the skating rink. He was a student whose behaviours in the classroom were disturbing to me and to the students; he was physically aggressive and his language was sexually explicit but on this day I was struck by the nature of our time together, it was so ordinary. When I returned to the school he was already in the classroom playing with wooden blocks. No sooner was I in the classroom than I was called to the office because his mother was in the school and this was an opportunity for me to meet her. She wanted to see the classroom and so I brought her down the hallway. We stood outside the door talking, visible to the students through the window. When I entered the room he started pelting me with wooden blocks. I was still wearing my jacket and it protected my physical body from the onslaught. However, there was nothing to protect my emotions from such an attack and I left the room. I returned with the principal who spent the last ten minutes of class in the room, in part because the other students were troubled by this behaviour. After school the principal explained that this student had never fit in anywhere in the school, nor had he shown any emotion; when he had come to school he just sat. Now that was changing, he was attending school regularly and developing relationships, however tenuous. On this last day before the Christmas break I think he was overwhelmed. He lost control of something he needed to control, the development of relationships between himself and his teacher and between his mother and his teacher.

It was important for me to communicate with parents and, whenever the opportunity presented itself I eagerly took it up, but the complexity of the interaction for both the students and myself stayed with me. In both stories, my communication with families was based on my experiences and the students and the parents responded to the communication out of their experiences. The mismatch between my intentions and the way in which parents understood my intentions was lived out by the students. The mismatch was brought to my attention in the emotional encounters between the children and I each time I communicated with their families.

Our classroom discussions highlighted difference, created discomfort for all of us and made me visible. In reference to the possibility of an academic discourse about an Indigenous research methodology, Weber-Pillwax, (1999, p. 33) comments that in the real world, "...very few individual members on either side of this divide [indigenous and non-indigenous people] are ever motivated enough to endure the suffering that is required to move beyond the politeness and to enter into the creation of shared meanings through conversation." It is the conversation the children sought. It is the conversation in which I learned to participate. We were different. We were student and teacher. We were Indian and white. We were child and adult. We were economically dependent and economically independent. We were male and female. We were rural and urban. Our effort to create a shared meaning reminded us that we were alike. We were human beings engaged in sense making, trying to understand the world in which we lived and our place in that world.

Elizabeth's story follows. I have placed it next to mine because her story counters and expands upon my understanding of whiteness. I saw Elizabeth as white. She provides a different sense of her 'self,' through her life stories.

Difference

Difference?
Hit it right on
straight on

Like that saying,
When I was young I thought I could change the world;
as I got older I learned that I could only change myself.

I'm happy with me now
It's brought peace to the classroom
I want students to have dignity, to see my dignity.

CHAPTER 4

Being Other: Elizabeth's Narratives of Identity and Classroom Practice

I taught with Elizabeth when I returned to teaching. Thinking about that time, I returned to my journal and found a note outlining the beginning of our relationship. "I've had several short conversations with Elizabeth this week and they've been very enlightening. She's so helpful, she understands my problems…because her story is so much like my own" (journal entry, January 29, 1991). We had been discussing the problems associated with my return to work after being a stay at home mom for fourteen years. This time, as we work together, it is our dissimilar stories that are helping me to construct an understanding of raced identities, specifically whiteness.

During the course of our conversations I attended a conference to present my research work. I asked each of the women to share a thought about the research process with me. Elizabeth said, "I'm thinking it's very good for us to have these talks and have these discussions but to also remember to live our lives to the fullest every day so that we can be who we are" (04.06.98). A sense of who she is develops in her life stories and a sense of how she lives each day develops in her stories of classroom practice.

Stick out your arm

My first year of teaching was a grade six class and little Jeremy decided that maybe I was a racist and, at that moment, I didn't really know how to deal with it. I still don't know if I did ok, but I went up to him and I said, stick out your arm. So he stuck it out and I stuck out mine and mine's fairly dark. I said, do you see much difference there? No. I said, well then just forget it. If I hit it right on, straight on, there's not too much difficulty with it, I don't think, not yet anyway (11.18.97). I go from something that my dad told me a long time ago. As I was growing up and then being fairly small, I had a lot of questions about a lot of things like ethnicity, although I didn't call it ethnicity then, so I approached my dad about it (11.18.97).

On my mom's side my grandparents came to Canada and on my dad's side my dad came. He was a DP; he came after the war. Very early I had to figure out who I was and how I was going to try and fit into things. It wasn't always easy (11.18.97). I don't think my dad ever considered himself a displaced person (04.06.98).

I grew up on a farm. I was really fortunate in the sense that in the community where I lived and grew up there were only about two Ukrainian families and so if there aren't too many then you're kind of welcomed and you're considered, not an oddity, but novel. So that way I was very fortunate (11.18.97). There were some unwelcome incidents from some people in the community that we were in; a little further afield we had some encounters that weren't pleasant (04.06.98).

I guess I knew that at my house we did things differently, I wasn't sure how they did them at other houses but I was pretty sure that we did things differently. I mean, for starters, I knew we spoke a different language at home. I didn't speak a whole lot of English when I started school, I spoke mostly Ukrainian so it was pretty obvious to me. I noticed right away (04.06.98). I knew exactly who I was when I went to school. There was no mistake about it. I knew it all the way through and there was no question of who I was, it was just a question of how quickly I would catch up to everyone else, come up to everyone else's standard (11.18.97).

What he said was comforting to me and I've held onto it and I use it, I think I try to live by it. He said, if you take two people and if you cut one's finger and if you cut the other's finger they'll both bleed red blood, the same. Somewhere as human beings we are all the same but we all have different backgrounds, we all have different places, we all have different stories (11.18.97).

Life giving spirit, if you think of something being life giving, to me, that's what we're really put on this earth for, to have life given to us, to be life giving and those are the rights that we have. I mean they come out in all kinds of different ways and you can label them in ten thousand different ways. I'd even go as far as to say that if you're working *from that core or trying to work from that core you won't really have a lot of problems with Native, non-Native and gender issues. A lot of them just go away, they're not even there because you're giving respect, they're receiving respect, they're learning things that are of value. ...For me that [golden core] doesn't change. It's an impossibility to change but what goes around it [gender, race], I can think about those things, I can evaluate them to some extent, as I gain knowledge and information, I can change them, I can react differently to them on different occasions but that core, once it's gone my body will be dead (02.09.98).*

[Students] would like to be very much a buddy, a friend and I find I don't want that. I want them to have dignity, I want them to see my dignity, I want them to learn that way. The reason I said that is because when I started school I couldn't speak English and no one asked me whether I wanted to be put into this school (10.28.97). I do apply my stories but the more I can be open to their stories the better it is for both of us (11.18.97).

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As a Ukrainian Canadian Elizabeth's childhood experience encompassed being seen as novel and being discriminated against. She felt fortunate to live in a community with only a few Ukrainian families because it limited the discrimination she knew was a part of being Ukrainian. Both experiences set her apart and reinforced the aloneness she feels and speaks of so poignantly, "but what stands out is the aloneness, the loneliness, not having anyone to talk to" (04.06.98).

Her own experience of difference, as separate from her family's experience of difference, began when she entered school. She sought out her father for an explanation of her lived experience and, as she said, she took comfort in his words. As an adult her spirituality, her sense of a life giving spirit, guides her thinking and gives her another perspective on her experiences, a sense of herself beyond that of Ukrainian and female. Her memory on the body is a painful one. She says, in reference to ethnicity, "the pain, I think, that a person goes through is incredible. I think I have gone through an awful lot of pain. I'm glad that I'm able to be at the place where I can talk about it and try and make some sense out of it" (11.18.97). However, she cannot erase this memory on her body and her initial response to our research conversation is a bodily one, "I'm fine, I was ok sitting here and then Merle starts talking about when she grew up and I'm listening to this and I'm categorizing it and where it's supposed to fit in relationship to me and then we hear DP and I'm sitting right up there" (11.18.97). Her recognition of this memory on her body serves as a backdrop for the self-understanding she has constructed, a self-understanding that encompasses her place in the larger world. Northrup (1994) states that, "gaining access to spiritual guidance means looking at the pattern of our lives over time" (p. 611). Elizabeth's understanding of the pattern of her life guides her both personally and professionally.

Working with difference in her classroom, Elizabeth said, in reference to being called a racist, "I still don't know if I did ok" (11.18.97). Her comments point to the institutional loneliness of working in classrooms and specifically, the loneliness of working with difference in classrooms. Where and when do teachers have the opportunity to converse about their teaching practice? From Elizabeth's perspective, they don't and as she looks back over her years of teaching she is still thinking about that teaching story.

Money matters

Our Native students come into a lot of money when they're 18 years old and when you're talking to them, unless you're really conscious of it, you do bring in what you think. So coming from my background there was no money, no how, no where, no way and you earned it yourself and you got through and you were encouraged to do that. So inside me it's like, take this money, do something with it, and I caught myself for the first time in my life the other day being vocal about this. We were doing examples, it had to do with something about our futures, and I actually called attention to it in a way that wasn't a putdown or a criticism and I said, what a gift you have to be able to do something. So many of them just blow it on a truck and so I can see some lights going on and it was a really nice, good feeling (10.28.97). You have to look at some goals for yourself, in your own little self. You have to make some decisions, not what a brother or sister has done, not necessarily what your parents are saying or what's happening [but] what you want to do (10.28.97).

...I was the oldest and I just have a younger sister so the world was wide open to me. There weren't any brothers that, from what I'm hearing, take priority. I mean it was, do it, go and see what you can do. I felt it was all up to me so whatever I did accomplish, whatever it is, I did (02.09.98).

It would be wonderful to be able to progress as far as you'd like to with the education that you'd like but there are all kinds of restrictions that are in your way. I mean if I would have been born to this privileged class then maybe today I wouldn't be a teacher I'd be something else but I had to work my little way and try and advance as far as I could. In some people's eyes I probably haven't advanced very far but in my own situation, coming from a family where no one had gone to school, I've accomplished a lot (02.09.98). I put a lot of things on hold from my childhood. I didn't have time to entertain relationships because I had to go to school because I didn't want to be poor all my life, because I wanted to do something with my life, be someone... (02.09.98).

I feel like I've gone thousands and thousands of miles but what stands out is the aloneness, the loneliness, not having anyone to talk to. I find even to this day that sometimes I cannot find someone else who's travelled a journey that I have, someone that I can really tie in with. There are similarities in a lot of cases; there are things I can share with people. I think that's been my journey; I don't think I've ever found someone with whom I can sit down and share this automatic bond (04.06.98).

It bothers me to hear that women can't attain [something] because of the world we live in. It's men also that don't always reach their full potential. I mean depending on your *social status, where you start from, we don't live in a perfect world so the most you can hope to do, I think, is contribute your part (02.09.98). I've had opportunities and disadvantages like other human beings and being female has presented some situations, nothing that I couldn't overcome, nothing that would stand in my way of being who I was as a person. I considered myself a feminist at one time; I would say I'm beyond that, it's not an issue any longer (02.09.98).*

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Elizabeth's understanding of social class is interrelated with her understanding of herself as Ukrainian and her conception of different as novel became intertwined with the conception of being 'less than' other community members. What Elizabeth has accomplished in her life she attributes to a journey of "thousands and thousands of miles." The journey also describes the distance she perceived between herself and others. In our research conversations I represented 'other' and as she said to me, "you didn't have to [think about who you were], you were it" (11.18.97). Her comment illuminates her understanding of what could be achieved by making the journey of "thousands and thousands of miles."

Her embodied understanding is one she brings to the classroom, as she says, "you do bring in [to the classroom] what you think." She relates to how the students are positioned in society, the status that is ascribed to them through their identity–their race, class and gender. It is her hope that she can assist students in building a secure future. Elizabeth knows that they have to make a journey similar to the one that she did and she uses the money that comes to the students as an instance to help them see what is ahead and plan for that journey.

The contradictions expressed by Elizabeth's sense of herself exemplify the complex and contradictory nature of identity. 'Self' understanding is socially constructed in multiple sites, for Elizabeth these sites include her family, the ethnic community and the larger rural community in which she lived. What she learned about herself in each of these sites was contradictory; she says the world was wide open to her and also that there are all kinds of restrictions in a person's way. She talks about her own perception and others' perceptions of what she has achieved in her life; and that contradiction also contributes to the complex nature of her sense of 'self.' "Each individual person is in a different place of their privilege and how they see things" (04.06.98). While addressing the privilege that accompanies social classes other than her own she acknowledges that she was working "my little way and try[ing] to advance as far as I could."

These contradictions are multilayered, ethnicity, class, and gender converging and diverging through time and space. Now they serve as a backdrop to Elizabeth's understanding of herself as a spiritual human being.

Maybe that's my goal

We discussed our hopes for our students and the way in which we expressed those hopes in the classroom. Elizabeth made the following comment when Amelia said, in reference to her goal of getting her students into high school, "If they can get into high school, if they can cope when they're there, maybe there will be someone who can help them take that next step. I almost feel like if we present too much the step is too big, it's impossible, but if we can take this small step and somebody else can take over, we might get another step further" (11.18.97).

Is it that my trust is so little in the students that I think I have to put something before them? What's wrong if they have their children, look after their children, their kokums help them look after their children and then they go to university as many of them are doing? Now, what's wrong with that? Why do I have to make sure that they get their high school education right now? They have their treaty money and they have enough to keep going for a long time if they use it wisely. Maybe they should be taught to use it wisely, maybe that's my goal instead of me wanting them to get through high school (11.18.97). We have to take a look at our curriculum, who puts our curriculum together, isn't it just the privileged we are talking about? (04.06.98).

My parents never said, I love you. Someone taught me that this was the appropriate thing to say. When I turned, I think 12 or 13, someone said, well you have to hug your parents, so I remember going to my father every night giving him a kiss on the cheek and giving him a hug goodnight because that was the expected thing to do. I could be very angry, I think I am, about a lot of these things that have been imposed on me. It's another culture's idea, or someone's idea, of how life should be. Where I came from and the things that were happening in my home and in my family made my life a happy one (10.28.97).

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In response to another participant, Elizabeth comments, "I don't know if I'm particularly sensitive or overly sensitive to people who mean well but who really hurt family structures, who hurt the very things they're trying to do" (11.18.97). This observation is drawn from her own experience and her story illustrates the parallels she draws between her experience and that of her students. Her story illuminates the tension she experiences between the needs of the students and the mandated curriculum, a curriculum she knows is not culturally neutral. It also illustrates what is, for her, a cultural dilemma. Years ago she internalized the unwritten expectations of school, expectations that were 'foreign' to her. Being in school placed her in an environment where she was left alone to reconcile the dissonance she was experiencing. From her stories, it is the aloneness that stands out rather than a sense of reconciliation between differing cultures. In her mind, school was a place where you came up to everyone else's standard (11.18.97).

Like Adams (1989) Elizabeth understands the difficulty her students have relating to the curriculum; "students have difficulty relating it to their frame of reference and making it part of their knowledge" (p. 132). Her point of view is also echoed by a mother who wrote to her son's teacher, "our children's experiences have been different from those of the 'typical' white middle-class child for whom most school curricula seem to have been designed (I suspect that this 'typical' child does not exist except in the minds of curriculum writers)" (Respect my child, p. 73). In wondering about the curriculum she teaches, Elizabeth is reliving her childhood story of being in school. This time, however, she uses that perspective to tell a different story of classroom practice, to put forward one possibility for working inside/outside cultures. "The individual teacher, administrator, or counselor may, indeed should, attempt to mitigate or subvert the purpose of Western education, but in so doing assume a difficult and ambiguous position" (Hampton, 1993, p. 300). The difficulty, for Elizabeth, resides in beginning and sustaining a conversation in school about her ideas for curricular change. The ambiguity, I believe, is something she has already experienced in her own education and it would prove to be less problematic for her.

Her analysis of curriculum is both personal and political. On a personal plane, she positions her stories alongside those of her students to make sense of her teaching dilemmas. At the same time she speaks to her understanding of the bigger picture, the cultural milieu that drives curricular decisions, "…who puts our curriculum together, isn't it just the privileged we are talking about?" Her work to accommodate difference is nested in personal experience, which is nested within a broader social and institutional framework. In our first conversation she said, "…I don't think we're clear on what we expect out of our education system and I think that's part of the problem we're experiencing in our education system" (10.28.97). She can relate the dilemmas in her teaching practice to the institutional framework. According to Sleeter (1993) resistance of white educators to change must be understood beyond the "ideas and assumptions in people's heads" to a structural analysis which "focuses on distribution of power and wealth across groups and on how those of European ancestry attempt to retain supremacy while groups of color try to challenge it" (pp. 157-158). Elizabeth understands this. She is proposing a curricular change while, at the same time, acknowledging the hegemony of curriculum. It is a dilemma she understands and speaks to in her work.

Am I being discriminatory?

I have a young man who's had difficulties before and I've had a run in with him in the hallway but this time in class he called me a bitch. I could feel the spit on my face. I just marched him out the room and down to the office and got called a bitch three more times on the way, you are a bitch, you are a bitch, you are a bitch. He got a five day suspension and then we're going to work for his expulsion. Meanwhile the parents withdrew him from school but now want some services for him. A kid said to me today, don't you want to be liked? And I said, well no, not if it means it's going to compromise your education. Humph [student] (04.06.98).

For a long time I had a hard time deciding how to deal with inappropriate language because I thought, am I being discriminatory? That is what they use, that's their language, they understand it when they speak it to one another so what am I doing here? But then I decided no, whatever you do out there you're doing, but in here we're doing it this way. So that has worked (04.06.98).

I don't think it's necessarily what they've heard at home because I've just had a couple of experiences where I've had an elder come in and apologize and a mother who came and apologized for her son, saying that she's heard that I've had a rough time with him and she really is sorry about it. It is prevalent in society, it is prevalent with their peers, and it's also prevalent in the media they watch. It's not necessarily from the home.

There's one student in my class who has a number of problems, one of them, the biggest one is that he doesn't have a lot of stick-to-it-ness to get his work done. The incident that brought his mother [to see me], well actually I ran into her at A&W, occurred when we were in an assembly. We were having a Cree speaker and she was saying a prayer and he was acting up so I called him out and I tore a strip off him. I said, you are the first one who cries discrimination in my classroom, because he is, and I said, now you have one of your own people saying a prayer and what are you doing to the students around you and to yourself? Well you can't talk to me like that. You don't live where I live and you can't talk to me like that. And I said, oh but I can. I said, I don't live there but I can talk to you any way I want to. So he left in a huff and after that he came back to class and I said, well, could I talk to you now? Yes. He's got a chip on his shoulder; I call it a chip anyhow. You see, for me, it isn't easy to sit here and say that just because I am white. I belong to the human race, I also feel some pain, I also feel something for them so it's not easy. I have some role to play in this and it's not just a majority thing (04.06.98).

I found it strange to call myself white, earlier.... I'd never considered myself as one of [the majority]...I mean I was treated well and everything, I just felt different and so I think I know how some Native students feel. They just feel different. I didn't feel part of the majority and I didn't feel part of the Ukrainian community either. There were some things I liked and some things that I could certainly identify with and some things I couldn't identify with (04.06.98).

I think, in some ways, I got a double whammy. My mom had polio when she was four so she was on crutches and I didn't really realize it until I think I was in grade two and someone, my girlfriend, said to me, well how does your mom get around on crutches? That was the first time that I stopped to think, wait a minute, here's something else. So there was that too. We lived with my grandparents for awhile, well until my grandparents passed away, so I lived in an extended family. My mom's parents looked out for her and as they got older then she had to care for them, she gave them their insulin shots and they had to be bathed a lot and she was able to do that and she cooked all our meals. She was really quite incredible (04.06.98).

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When Elizabeth comments on her feelings of being an outsider, of never thinking of herself as white, she made herself vulnerable; her words touched upon an important memory on her body. It was a time for tears, tears that welled up and overcame her words. It was a moment that touched each one of us and changed the conversation that followed.

When I proposed this research and invited the participants into the study I was using white as a broad category that included everyone who looked like me. Elizabeth's words stand out on the page because they are telling me something different. In her reference to "white culture" Frankenberg (1993) states that we cannot view it as "a uniform terrain, such that one might expect all white people to identify in similar ways with the same set of core beliefs, practices, and symbols" (p. 233). This is the point that Elizabeth is making; her skin colour doesn't dictate how she sees herself. She is making evident "how the construction of whiteness varies across lines of class, gender, and sexuality and how these constructions vary according to the politics of place and region" (Wray & Newitz, 1997, p. 4).

In *Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to be White*, Roediger (1998) explains that immigrants to North America did not come here thinking of themselves as white. Becoming white was a part of the immigrant experience, "immigrants often 'became white' as well as they 'became American' " (p. 19). Elizabeth did not take up this part of the immigrant experience. Nor did she feel a part of the Ukrainian community. This too is foreign to Elizabeth as she sees herself standing outside of that community, observing and occasionally participating in particular ethnic practices. Her mother's (dis)ability also came to be perceived as setting the family apart from others in the community. The everyday of Elizabeth's life was turned into something different, something that set her and her family outside the predominate, cultural perceptions of family. It is another way that she experienced the aloneness of which she speaks.

Am I being discriminatory? Her reflections on this question weave together her family and classroom stories. Elizabeth viewed her possible courses of action from outside her standpoint of teacher and realized that they could be interpreted as discriminatory. Her reflection on the issue of bad language led her to an understanding of the many and varied influences on the students' language. Her action is based on this broader understanding and is accompanied by community support.

Amelia's story follows. I have placed Amelia's and Elizabeth's stories side by side because of the common, spiritual thread that is woven through them both. Amelia began the discussion on spirituality and both she and Elizabeth concurred on the centrality of spirituality in their work. In a subsequent conversation Amelia commented, "…there's things about this [research conversations] that truly amaze me, and probably the one where it stood out the most was the one where we spent time on the spiritual element of things and how Elizabeth and I had common ground… (04.06.98).

Difference

My life's journey is one of

letting go of a need for commonness

recognizing difference

learning that each one of us speaks from a different place

striving for integrity.

It's ok to be different

to remain different

to be heard with interest and with questions that won't necessarily change my viewpoint.

Respect is more about difference than sameness,

there's no cost in respecting sameness.

Respecting people means respecting who they are and how they choose to live in a moment when their lives intersect with ours.

Make apparent difference; cherish difference.

CHAPTER 5

Spiritually Grounded: Amelia's Narratives of Identity and Classroom Practice

Amelia and I joined the same staff in the early years of our return to teaching. She was the special education teacher and I was teaching a grade three class. From the beginning we worked collaboratively. She always came to the room to meet with the student or students with whom she would be working and sometimes she spent time in the classroom working with the students. We came to know something of each other's teaching practice and we engaged in an ongoing conversation about our work. I enjoyed our 'team teaching' and appreciated her support of the work I was trying to do in the classroom.

At our third meeting Amelia talked about her teaching history. "This is my sixth year since I got my degree. I graduated in '91 and went for a year without a [teaching] job" (12.07.97). She then filled in her teaching history previous to the completion of her degree. "I had two years [of education] in the olden days between 1962 and 1964 and I had taught six and half years, four of them in junior high and two of them writing curriculum. I was already into special education then; there was no special education but I had a modified math class…. Then I was home with the kids…I ran a business" (12.07.97). While home with her children she also served for three years on the facility planning committee for a new school in the district, conducting population studies and a feasibility study. Once the school was built she served on the parent advisory committee and did some substitute teaching at the school. Her marriage ended and after five years of being on her own she completed a course in career planning and development.

> It sent me right back into education. I vowed I'd never be a teacher again…because I couldn't do enough for the kids who needed help…I said, over my dead body I'm not going back and then when they finelined it [career planning] it was special education and a light went on. I would be

working with those kids I had such a hard time meeting the needs of and so I went back to university and here I am (12.09.97).

White Man

I remember the first time I was called a môniyâw [white man]. I worked with a little boy who had trouble coping in the classroom. Somehow we got off on the right track. He was willing to come with me but as soon as he realized I had requirements for him there was trouble. Many, many times I lifted him off the floor and plunked him in his chair. One day he ended up in the corner of my room over by the cabinets and I said, Brent this won't do, you have to sit down in your desk. Get away from me you môniyâw, I'm not doing anything. I said, what did you call me? He said, a môniyâw. I said, what is a môniyâw? White man. And it was just like venom being spit out of his mouth and I'm thinking, I am, I am (11.18.97).

My father came to this country with his parents when he was sixteen. His mother was German, his father was Polish. His father served in the Russian army and therefore my dad was born in Brunsk, Russia. Many Russian soldiers immigrated to Canada after the war; my father was a part of that and arrived here about 1932 (11.18.97).

So God is sometimes kind. The school's floor was made up of black and white tiles and I had seen the patterns; they stand out for me. I'd noticed that in the foyer there were no black tiles so I think, we shall have fun (11.18.97).

I believe that if somehow we had eyes that are different than our own eyes, eyes that could see things that are in spiritual dimensions, that we can actually see that within ourselves there is a golden core. I envision it as being this round, narrow, golden core that runs through the core of your body and in there is God's plan about how life should be in its idealness and who you are in his idealness. The gold is right in the centre and around that is the silver wrapping which takes into account your life experiences...that's very much a part of who you are as well. So, to me, when things touch the golden core, they clash with what's he's put there and we can be sure enough about who he says we are *for it to run off though there are times that it's got motives behind it that are so destructive, in a sense, that still it's touched.... If you can respect yourself, if you can love yourself and appreciate yourself as who you are, you can do that with other people. If you can't do it with yourself you can't truly do it with them either and so I know when I walk in that classroom if I'm satisfied with me, I'm satisfied with them. You can be as big a jerk as you want and when you're in tomorrow morning we'll start with a clean sheet and we'll go on. I'm not going to have this dragging over from yesterday. I believe in every one of those kids there is that golden core, whether they know it or not. For some children only in very small pieces of time can I let them know that I've seen it and I've found it and I know it's there. For other kids it's there most of the time and they know it; they know I know it and I work from there.... [When your golden core is touched] you need to deal with yourself in terms of what are you going to do with this? Are you going to let it sit there and fester or will you do something else with it? The answers are multitudinous as to what you can do, like go face the mess, not easy or fun things to do but otherwise you're imprinted by it (02.09.98).*

I said to him, if I'm a white man, what are you? Well, I'm black, I'm not white. And they will call themselves and each other black, our kids will anyway, they did at my former school; I've heard it, certainly, at the school where I'm currently working. I said to him, we're going to go walk down the hallway, all the way up into senior high and we have one rule, I can only walk on white squares because I'm white and you can only walk on black squares because you're black. Walking up the hall, he's as happy as can be, hopping along. We get to the corner and he can't make it to the next black square and I said to him, what are we going to do Brent? I can keep going, what are you going to do? Well, I don't know, I can't step that far and I'm sure not stepping on your white. I said well this it true; that's the rule. And he couldn't figure it out and I said, Oh I know how you could do it without stepping on my white, I'll just pick you up and lift you over and set you on the black one and you won't have to step on my white one. And so away we went and at the next corner we did the same thing.

When we got back to the class I said to him, so what did we learn out there? You're white and I'm black and you had white squares and I had black squares. What did we have to do when you had trouble with your black squares? Well, you had to help me. And, I said, that's exactly why I'm here, you're going to be who you are and I'm going to be who I am and all I'm doing here is helping you. I have always said that to my students. Many times they've said to me, you're white and we're not listening to you. And I have to say, yes I am white. I want you to stay who you are, I want you to be Native or Indian or whatever you want to call yourself and I'm going to stay who I am but we both have to grow.

I highly prize the fact that I'm living in a country where you are the first people who lived here and you have a special status here and that's important to me and I don't want to mess with that, that's important but I need room, I'm here too, we can't go back and change it. And I've always talked with them in that sense. We are different. They believe it. I honestly believe there is much common ground but they do have a different history, they do have a different place in Canada. They have been treated far differently than I've been treated. They have reasons why they spew out, you're a white man. Now we live together in Canadian society and to be successful in terms of having a job and feeling like a productive person in society there are certain ways that we go to reach that and I can help you learn what you need to have but always be you, always be you in your uniqueness. I don't want you to become white and I won't become Native but we're going to walk side by side and be who we are (11.18.97).

They have a right to angry and bothered and upset about how things have gone. On the other hand, life is ahead of us and we need to decide what we're going to do with it and how we're going to live it (03.09.98). In the setting I work in, the Native setting, I have no problem when a child yells racism. From the historical sense of what's happened, I understand why they could or would. But then how do we live beyond that, how do we get over it? It's easy for me to sit here and say this as a white person and as a majority but to be in their shoes I don't know (04.06.98).

When I was in grade eight there was a fairly large influx of German immigrants into our rural area and they were referred to as DP's and they were certainly looked down upon. DP is not a word that I have heard for years and years and years and yet I can remember that people were frequently referred to as DP's and it was kind of a stigma. Within our family, no, because my grandparents would speak German with my dad very often when they came to visit. My mom understood German, her mother was German, and so there was a more acceptable setting for that within our own familial boundaries. There was no looking down upon because there was common ground there, in a sense. Nobody told me this but when I look back I think the feeling was, from my dad particularly, that they are no different than he was a few years ago and so there was a very accepting attitude on his part. I can remember the blacksmith who came into town, his son being in my grade, and my dad very much supporting the business that he started and because there was a common language there it wasn't a problem for him, this was all fairly acceptable.

There was always this kind of fine line, I was not alone in that, knowing how my dad perceived these people and hearing they might be dumb, that was the word then, and somewhat ostracized for it too, including by myself. Now the ones who were successful academically not so much but the ones who struggled, you bet, it was not a pretty thing. I look back at it now with a sense of, I'm not happy me was me (11.18.97).

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The intersection of stories in "White Man" illustrates a teaching practice that embodies Amelia's familial and spiritual understandings of her 'self.' As a child, Amelia developed a sense of her self both within her extended family and their interactions with the German community and in the larger, rural community where her family lived. The world views differed and the tension she experienced as she travelled between the two realities is a tension that is a memory on her body. Her own reflection on this travel is that, "I look back at it now with a sense of, I'm not happy me was me." She has reconciled the tension by living in the larger community and celebrating the uniqueness of human beings, as exemplified by her teaching practice. As she says to the student in the story, at different points in the story, "you're going to be who you are," "I want you to stay who you are," "you have a special status and that's important to me and I don't want to mess with that."

"Difference is celebrated as a reflection of the creativity of spirit" (Northrup, 1998, p. 51) and Amelia celebrates difference in this way. At the same time, she draws on her spirituality as a way of connecting all human beings. She sees every person as possessing a golden core and in that core is God's plan for each person. Amelia relies on her spirituality for guidance, in this instance, when difference presents a problematic face in her teaching practice. Her spirituality is also embedded in her belief that each day in the classroom is a new day, "we'll start with a clean sheet and we'll go from there." This is one of the ways that she honours the golden core of her students.

In another of our conversations Amelia talked about her work in a band controlled, First Nations school, "whether I knew it or not before, I at least fairly quickly gained the understanding that I was there in a helping capacity and I was only there in as much of a helping capacity as they could take from me, not even were willing to take from me, but could take from me" (11.18.97). This understanding is another translation of Amelia's belief in the uniqueness of human beings. She is in the classroom to facilitate the development of each student's golden core. For some children she works with small pieces of the core they have made evident, for other children, "it's there most of the time and they know it and they know I know it and I work from there." Since completing her degree she noted that,

> one of the things I can do in special education is take the time to talk to kids and it's very easy for them to begin sharing parts of their lives…if the group is small enough and close knit enough or if it's an individual child, I always make room to allow them the freedom to talk about who they are and what's happening for them and make a point of later on asking them what's transpired out of it. The way I see to work with children who have difficulties is to build a rapport and a relationship with them (12.09.97).

Why don't you quit?

I think [the students'] personal goal is to destroy me in a certain kind of way. I'm sure they would be sad if they did but they're certainly enjoying the process and they'll do everything and anything in the process and one of them is commenting on my clothes. I've had other kids comment on my clothes but not in such a cutting, out to degrade you, kind of way. I'm not breaking so [they] become more and more personal in the attacks.

They are very aware of clothes, very aware of clothes, and I am frequently told about my clothes in the most direct manner. Do you get all your stuff at Value Village? Well, as a matter of fact, no I don't. Speaking of Value Village, when I was at another school somebody said something about Value Village. I never knew what it was. I didn't know if it was a good place or a bad place. The kids do this to me, why don't you get some real clothes and I'm saying but these are some of my best. Then I've gotten crazy on them and I have worn my really good clothes. They say, who do you think you are wearing that to school? I said, there's no pleasing you guys. I get my socks to match my sweaters, you complain and you laugh at them. I wear a different color pair and you tell me they don't match. They're very aware of clothes, very, and they comment in a negative kind of manner (12.09.97). [Another time] a student said to me…, boy you don't wear very nice clothes. Where do you get them, Value Village? They always talk to you like that and I said, well what do you want? Well why don't you spend some of your money on clothes? I said, because I have none left. Well what do you use it for? I said, well in part I'm still paying off my student loans. What is a student loan? What do you need a loan for? And I said, when I went to university I had to borrow money to go to university because I have to pay for it. You have to pay to go to university? Yes. Then why did you go? (10.28.97).

They have said, why don't I quit, why don't I leave, haven't we done enough yet? They're grade nine students, they're fairly articulate about that and I'm not sure I fully know why. Possibly, it's because the dynamics change in the small setting of the resource room as opposed to the larger, regular class. There are just four students and one pretty much doesn't participate but the other three will and one of them is a student I've had for three years. Usually I know that he's only going along with it whereas the other two are far more deliberate about it.

I laid assault charges against Stephen. He goes into my desk and I am trying desperately hard right now to remember to lock it each time that group comes in. I don't like having to do that but they don't leave you many alternatives. So he had gone into my desk and he took dice, two dice that were right at the edge. He had reached across, pulled the drawer open and took them. And I knew he did. And he claims he didn't. He had those dice for a week and he's fooling around with them and I was not far from his desk working with another student and he dropped them on the floor and he didn't go to pick them up right away. So what I did was I just turned and stepped on them. And he came out of his chair very low and hit me in the thigh, knocked me off balance, and I fell against another kid's desk and I ended up with a huge bruise on my hip. And sore, like it wasn't until I went to bed that I noticed that it was sore and I thought, bursitis acting up again or something and in the morning thought, I should really look at my hip in the mirror because it is just so sore. I was stunned, I had no idea that it was that bruised and when I fell against the desk all I can remember is thinking, thank God I didn't fall on the floor because they would never have quit laughing. And so I laid charges against him. And I don't know whether I would've but that very same day a girl whom I have never taught in my life, I think I once…did a small assessment on her–I'm standing talking in the doorway of the gym and she's coming from behind me and she just bent her shoulder and took a run at me and hit me right between the shoulder blades and sent me flying.

I can't explain what seeing the bruising did when a student had done it. I've been bruised often and it's not that big a deal but the fact that a student did it had an impact on me that I can't explain. It went somewhere inside of me that I'm not used to things going and I ended up going to the director and basically saying to him, buy my contract out, let me go, I've had enough, but he wouldn't. And it was his direction to lay the charges and I did.

…on Friday this Victor, the one I've had for three years, I'm holding the door open looking into the hallway because there was some kind of ruckus and he comes along; my arm is fully extended, and he's six two and he just turned fourteen years old and he walked full body into my arm and just hyperextended my elbow. Like it's only now that I can wring a cloth because it tore the tendons and muscles in the elbow and I was so impacted by all of this, the Wednesday incident, the having to go to the police, the having to write out the report, the having to go the doctor, having to explain it to the doctor, for this to happen on Friday and I did nothing about [this assault]. I have a number of reasons why I did nothing. One being that I feel like I'm fingered and you know you can keep going up or someone can stop and I chose to stop. Now I can never probably prove that's the case plus the fact that it means [more trips into the city and hearing] you lied! you lied! you lied! You know daily I get this, whatever I do, if I write down in the behaviour book that they've been swearing, I've lied (01.12.98).

I don't think they like that I've taken a stand in terms of the assault. So why are they doing this? I believe it's part of a power trip for them. One student in particular, but in a sense the student population as whole, got rid of our principal in two weeks. So it's a real power trip for these kids and they are seeking someone else they can take this ride with and I happen to be the one at the moment. It's a very limited group of students but still a very, what would I say, aggressive and stressing group (01.12.98).

In teaching, I believe that if I'm to have a job on this earth that's my job. I feel like I'm specially made to do that job and I'm really glad that that's what I'm trying to do because it fits me very well. And in it I try to practice those things that I believe God would like us to practice with each other in terms of respect, caring, supporting, and standing by [one another]. I find in teaching sometimes the kids think I am awful because I almost never give them an answer, I give them another question and another question and I think that's a gift, that's what I've been given to do. ...Your questions are a guide, it's like driving in the fog and the headlights can only see so far for them but I'm up above the fog and I can see the road just fine. You can do that, and I often talk to them about using their brain, what their brain has got and what they can access and encouraging them to have the thrill of having thought through a problem to arrive at an answer and just be delighted that you really did that, feel the power of it. I think, though it's kind of hokey to say, there is love there, not just respect but love in the sense of really caring what happens to that person for the space and the time you've got them (02.09.98).

I can remember when I came back to university the second time to finish my degree, I had done some classes in Native Studies and I had gone to some events that they had on campus and was just fascinated and I always said if I didn't have kids at home and I had enough money I would buy a plane, put pontoons on it and fly into some Native community on a lake and teach there and I would come out every six weeks or two months for a haircut. And that was my dream, to do that so when I went to the reserve it was wholeheartedly but,...I quickly recognized, if not knew, that the destiny of the Native people is dependent on the Native people and I can provide them with some tools...to gain greater control of their own destinies. When I find someone coming in new and they're usually white and they're going to do all these things and get them on the road I think, back off. Become like us is what [they're] meaning (11.18.97).

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This is a difficult classroom story with which to work. Amelia finds it difficult to reconcile what is happening in her classroom with what she believes about herself, her students and teaching. It was difficult to watch this unfold over the course of our research conversations. On the one hand, she is able to step back from what is happening and analyze the reasons for the students' behaviour and on the other hand she says, "I've been bruised often and it's not that big a deal but the fact that a student did it had an impact on me that I can't explain. It went somewhere inside of me that I'm not used to things going…" Her body, including her golden core, could not withstand the physical assaults; the wisdom that resides in that golden core was being sorely tested. "Living in touch with our inner guidance involves feeling our way through life using all of ourselves: mind, body, emotions, and spirit" (Northrup, 1998, p. 52). Her spirit guide, her 'self' was now under attack and the bruises were the physical manifestation of that attack. It is the one part of her that had remained untouched; the expression, "I was shaken to my core" comes to mind as a way of describing how Amelia was feeling during this time. She may even have come to doubt her dream of flying into a Native community. She completed the school year and then found a teaching position at another school.

In her helping capacity, the students did continue to learn from her; she says, "…in spite of the course that Stephen and I have taken, in spite of all of that, I still like him as a human being. I want good things for him and he knows that and that has probably caused his poor little mind to just be at a loss. He can't understand why I would charge him with assault for what he did and tell him he must come back in my room and I like him…they don't go together for him" (04.06.98). She talked about his anger as he returned to class and, in one of our discussions, another participant suggested that he could be moved to another classroom so he would not get behind with his work. Amelia responded, "I think there's a deeper learning than academic here, a more valuable learning than academic…[he'll] learn something about acceptance" (04.06.98). In reference to any racial overtones that accompanied the assault charges, she says, "[the students] know about it, they all have been endlessly unhappy about it and told me all sorts of things about me. …some of it probably bordered on white but no more than the chalk did" (04.06.98).

Come on you little guys

I think in schools nowadays we have levels of students, I think the students are aware of it about others as well as about themselves. I find myself aware of it and I'm careful in certain senses about it. We have a group of students who are considered the upper crust and I really don't want to give them my time because they flaunt their status all the time (12.09.97).

I was from a farm and I was always very aware, very conscious, that we were not one of the richer farm families. We were a struggling farm family and I always felt there was a big heap of farm families on top of me and then there were the town people. They were just something else altogether. If town people spoke to you it was a kind of recognition you seldom received in an easy way, especially if it was positive; it was almost scary because you weren't within your element anymore (11.18.97).

I knew exactly where I fit. The divisions would have been urban and rural and maybe they were parallel a bit but rural was always a little lower than urban and urban had its breaks in there and some of the upper rural would be higher than the lower urban because there was the 'across the tracks' syndrome and yet in the end we were all just people. Those things were factors in dismissing those who were DP's and who were struggling in school. [The divisions] were blatantly obvious to me from the day I started school. I'm not sure it was before then because I don't remember social interactions on my own with children other than going to other family friends. I think one of the things that goes with this is the financial status of your family. It was very obvious with the town kids that they had the better clothes, you know the upper ones, and the same with some of the *upper rural families but then there was a whole pile of us who just had clothes period, that's all we had and that in itself is very, very visible. Not only the clothes, it seems they know something that we don't know, they know something about themselves, now this is me down here talking about up there, it's like they come to school knowing that they are somehow more affluent. They must have a different social circle that they're knowledgeable about the haves and the have nots kind of thing. And they seem to have money, like they can do things we could never do. When class pictures came out they always bought class pictures. I can remember wanting, like it was the greatest want in grade six, to get a class picture and I can remember it being fifty cents and somehow I was sure I had the power to convince my mom to give me this money and I didn't. I was devastated. But that was never a question for them. Lunches were different, everything. Now why would I have been a part of the dismissing of those who were DP's and who were struggling in school? Now when I behaved so atrociously, like to me this is a little mark on my walk through life, I think why did I do that? It never entered my head that it would make me acceptable higher up, that was not a factor for me. Rather it was some little evil inner piece in me that wanted to have some one-upmanship over someone (12.09.97).*

I hate it, I hate it. They're the ones who get their way in everything because their father is in the right place. Where I am more comfortable is probably where I came from, down at the bottom. Like, come on you little guys you haven't had it good but we can do wonderful things, [just] wait until we figure out what your brain can do! If I just think [about] my kids, they are almost all there [lower]…they're not the ones who have power in the community (12.09.97).

I was the brain [in my family]. I hated it; I hated it because they were all measured against me. I hated it. For my sister who was next to me, we were only in grade one and two, I knew that it made her life miserable. I didn't know about difference in kids' learning, their ability to learn, but there very clearly was one and then when she got to *grade two she actually failed. That was awful for her and I knew it was awful but I couldn't stop everybody, I don't know whether I tried to, I at least felt like I couldn't stop them and it didn't please me at all. I can remember her crying over homework, "If Amelia can do it you can do it too." I'm just [thinking] give me the homework and I'll do it (04.06.98).*

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"Where I am more comfortable is probably where I came from, down at the bottom." She understands something of the position in which the students find themselves; she learned at an early age how she fit into the community where she lived. With this in mind, she brings to her students the understanding of herself that she learned from her father.

> I'd go to my dad and say, please Dad can't I go out into the field and do something…I didn't want to be with my mom because I didn't sense any approval of me on Mom's part where I had my dad's complete approval, like I don't know what I could have done to not have his approval and so, in terms of a person, I always felt very accepted, other than by my mom (02.09.98).

Her relationship with her father allowed her to be who she was and who she wanted to be. She thrived in his unconditional support and encouragement and this is what she is offering to her students. She believes they are capable of achieving great things in the same way her father believed she could do whatever she set her mind to doing.

Hopes and dreams

The following story was told in response to AliceAnn's comment that, "I say [to students] when you finish high school and you choose where you're going to go and study…I don't think there's a single culture that doesn't want that for their children"

(11.18.97). Amelia said, "I'm not sure that I do what you say you're doing there and maybe it's because of my experience at [another school]" (11.18.97).

One of my students used to come into my room and sit down at my desk. My desk is out of bounds, my rule, it's my desk, I'm sorry, you can't go there. And he would come in and sit down at my desk. I liked him so much, he struggled a fair bit, and I hated to just [repeat] this is my rule and out of there, so I did this thing with him. John, seven more years of school and four years of university and I'll give you that desk but until then you can't sit there. I did that, who knows how many times with him, and he's thinking he could be a teacher. I'm aware of not looking at it or examining it very much, the hope of John being a teacher is one in a billion, you know, because of the difficulties he was having. It became a game with us, in a sense, but it had a degree of reality for him such that when I had to leave I was devastated. I thought, what have I done to this boy? I've kind of created this story and nurtured it a bit with him and I'm walking out. To me walking out, abandonment, is rampant on reserves and while I didn't make this choice that doesn't change where it leaves the person. I ended up in the counselor's office crying and since that experience I have not done that with another child. I have not put before them what might be there, rather I've encouraged them in the parameters of the school setting with the goal being high school. I've certainly encouraged them in terms of that, no question about it, but I haven't gone beyond that. To a fair degree those are not their values. There's the odd one that gets that taste and has that capability and looks that far. To get them into high school and to have them be successful in high school is a big step for their generation…and that's what I want for them, a good solid step so that they can build on that. If they can get into high school, if they can cope when they're there, maybe there will be someone who can help them take that next step. I almost feel like if we present too much the step is too big, it's impossible, but if we can take this small step and somebody else can take over, we might get another step further (11.18.97).

...we were on a farm and when I was in grade seven my dad got a new tractor, which was a prize thing in the whole community, and he let me drive it. I couldn't have been flying higher. I started milking cows, got up at five thirty in the morning, would go and get the cows, put them in the barn, milk them before I went to school every day and again when I came home. I loved it, like my life was as good as a life could be. I basically ignored what women did (02.09.98). When it came to going to university...I can remember them standing in the kitchen and I was determined to go and my mom said, we can't afford that and my dad said, I'll rob a bank if I have to so you can go (02.09.98).

We are told repeatedly that the cream of the kids is going to school elsewhere. I sometimes feel like our kids almost can't understand what the options are for themselves because they have nothing to show them that other than our words and our words are almost impossible to them. I don't sense a hunger on their part to be different than they are. As a matter of fact I'm told that. Why are you pushing us? We're just going to drop out and in couple of years we'll go to [an adult education centre] and we'll get paid to go to school, then I'll work. I keep saying, it won't change, you won't work, you'll go enough to get the money but you won't work (11.18.97).

My history with Native people goes back to a long time ago when we were still on the farm and my dad was breaking land. There were reserves around and he would hire Indian men or families to do root picking because he felt they were good workers. And their very nice white tent was always over there under the trees and they had their own stove in there, one of those pot belly things that had the stovepipe going through the roof and they cooked on it. My dad would buy them groceries. Sometimes he would take them in to buy their groceries as well as pay them. They were always very quiet and stayed to themselves in the yard. I can look at that now and maybe understand why. I didn't understand then. I didn't really know or interact with them but they fascinated me (11.18.97).

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Amelia says, "it seems that some people have come to work in a Native situation and I call it coming with the saviour syndrome and I abhor that kind of approach. I don't know how clean I was in that when I started" (11.18.97). During a later discussion she refers to the saviour syndrome as the messiah complex and in reference to that says, "you will not save anyone…the difference you're going to make is that they can use themselves better (01.12.98). We're all on journeys, our journeys are not necessarily the same and if you hear something that lacks some of your own wholeness, that's ok…maybe you can expand their thinking a bit but they've got to find their own path with all of this" (03.09.98). Amelia's words are echoed in the following quote that appeared as part of a letter written by a mother (Respect my child, 1977) to her son's teacher.

> The term "culturally deprived" was invented by well-meaning middle-class whites to describe something they could not understand. Too many teachers, unfortunately, seem to see their role as rescuer. My child does not need to be rescued; he does not consider being Indian a misfortune. He has a culture, probably older than yours; he has meaningful values and a rich and varied experiential background. However strange or incomprehensible it may seem to you, you have no right to do or say anything that implies to him that it is less than (p. 73).

This mother raises important points for consideration by white teachers in classrooms of First Nations students. Amelia's words represent a necessary part of that reflection. The following comment signals an important part of her reflection, an understanding of the historical context in which she and the students are located.

> …they are oral historians, with the residential schools that was broken and they truly are a people without that. They are striving in all sorts of ways to try and reestablish that and I don't know what the answer is because they are not successfully reestablishing that when we have someone like [a white teacher] teaching about sweat lodges, like to me this is an

> abomination and yet it's the best that is left. Here they are the most rooted Canadians we can imagine; they have been here longer than anyone but without roots because of this swath that cut through their history and severed it (05.11.98).

She struggles with the difference in values between herself and her students because she sees the students' education as their key to the future.

> …rightfully or wrongfully I look at the opportunity that my [own] kids have had to pursue education, to therefore have a greater assurance of having productive lives out in society…and it would be for these kids too…I see it as giving them a better option, not just another one but a better one and that's my value, I know that…when I look at the Native setting I would really desire it to be their value because I see it as their opportunity to free themselves from some of what is binding them… (10.28.97).

The school board did not renew her contract along with other staff members. The nonrenewal of her contract created issues for her and also for John, the student in the story. She has, over the years, maintained contact with him. However, the emotional toll of this experience was such that she has never again engaged in nurturing a student's hopes and dreams in the same way.

Foreign ground

Sometimes it's very heart wrenching to hear them talk, to listen to the kids, because you begin to get a grip on truly what a difficult thing it is to fit in other than in their own immediate society. I mean being acceptable; I wouldn't go so far as to say belonging, beyond their own community. They very much feel they are not acceptable and in certain senses they're not, what they do, the way they behave, it isn't acceptable. There's times in their own community when their behaviour is not acceptable but when someone goes to deal with it then everybody becomes defensive and won't let anything happen. It just remains in that dormant, go nowhere place (05.11.98).

He said, sometimes we go to West Edmonton Mall and everybody looks at us, everybody looks at us. I said, really Victor, I've always wondered, do they? And he said, yes, they look at us and I don't know what they're looking for. Are they afraid we're going to steal something off of them or what? A little piece of my heart breaks when I hear kids say that, like man oh man life is hard enough for them without this added component (11.18.97).

My grade nines often challenge me, well what good is this math going to do for us? We can go to the mall and we can be sitting on the benches and security comes over to us and they're on us right away. There's somebody else sitting on the benches over there and they're not bothering them but they come to us because we're Indians and they want us out of there. And I keep saying to them, I can't argue with you, I know that happens but you can change that. And some of that change will occur because of the change in attitude on your part. It needs to change on theirs as well but it also needs to change on yours. I know it's too big for them to understand but it doesn't stop me from talking to them about. I don't know what they glean from it. They're to a point now where they give me the floor to speak where before they would just shout me down (05.11.98). I see this as a very long term kind of thing and so you plant the seeds there. You can change that but then it's up to them to say, how can I change it? When they ask, how can I change it, then they can begin to hear some of what you're going to say. If I say that without them wondering how they can change it, it's lost and it becomes old words when it's reiterated again and again. Sometimes it's very heart wrenching to hear them talk because you begin to get a grip on truly what a difficult thing this is for them. …planting those seeds, that's an expression of hope. I wouldn't have thought of having hope but I guess I do. If this is a long road and we're on a journey I do probably because I wouldn't be there if I didn't have some kind of hope, if I thought it was hopeless. I don't think it's hopeless. It always comes back to, and I've tried hard to remember this, that you can have a tremendous impact on one person and it's that impact on the one person that is going to make a difference. You will not change their society but you may change that one person and wherever I work that's the bottom line, making a difference with one person (05.11.98).

I knew the powwow was on at the reserve where I would be teaching and I thought, I'll go. I had gone to another powwow the previous summer and it was ok to go there because I knew a lot of the kids [from school] and the odd adult. What an experience [this time]! I drive through the reserve I'm sure five, six times a week in my normal life, before I taught there, but I'd never driven off the highway onto reserve land. Driving off the highway was an experience; this wasn't the reserve where I had worked, where I'd created a little bit of comfort.

I drove to the powwow grounds and there were cars all over and kids running everywhere and big people around too. I find this place to park my car and I'm feeling really strange. As I walk across the grounds I'm thinking, what if somebody came up to me and said what are you doing here? Like, how would I face that? Nobody did, it didn't make me feel any braver. I got to the gazebo under which they had their dancing and went in there. Not a soul I knew, was it foreign ground. It was such an amazing feeling because I was the outsider. I'm looking around and I'm thinking all these people brought lawn chairs. Here I am without a lawn chair, I can't stand in front of them, I don't know where to be, I don't know what to do. Then this voice said, Hey Amelia and I looked and it was Joan. Oh my good gosh, I could have hugged the life out of her.

I don't know how they perceived me when I went to the powwow. They may not even have noticed me but, my oh my, what foreign ground for me. It was an eye-opener for me to feel that way. I've never felt so alone, so isolated, and really I could say many things, not safe. I didn't have a feeling of what might happen to me but I also didn't feel my normal degree of safeness and I lacked confidence in terms of it being an ok place for me *to be. Like had somebody come to me and said, you're not welcome I don't think I would have argued with them. I think I would have left (11.18.97).*

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Unlike the previous year when Amelia had attended a powwow and was surrounded by people she knew, this time she was on her own and when she describes herself as, "bravely driving along" (11.18.97) there is already a sense of the emotional intensity of the experience for her. She talks of this experience as giving her "a taste of the other side" (11.18.97), of being 'other.' In our research conversation about Amelia's experience, one participant noted, "they probably did notice you, I'm thinking they did notice you and treated you probably just the way we treat them, she's not drunk or disorderly, she's quiet, let her be" (11.18.97).

In sharing their stories, the students do not describe the same feelings, they feel singled out by the looks of other shoppers, by the attention of mall security and the implicit message that they are participating in criminal activity. Cardinal-Schubert (1991, p. 9) describes similar experiences, "…I noticed that the sight of me brought a kind of shifty-foot-changing attitude. I was watched in stores, I stood for a long time at counters waiting to be waited on…. But things are different now, aren't they?" Her response to her question is the same answer the students would give, "not much." The dominant culture's lack of acceptance ties into the students' sense of themselves; they come to see and understand themselves, in part, through the messages conveyed to them as they go about their business at the mall.

Amelia's search for common ground is based on an acknowledgement of difference in the classroom. Yet beyond the classroom both she and her students experience an acute sense of difference, a sense of magnified difference. For Amelia, this experience occurred once and the emotional tone of the experience itself changed as soon as she met someone she knew. For the students, their experiences occur constantly and the emotional tone of the experience itself is repeated time and time again. Amelia's experience came to her by way of choice. The students' experiences come to them by way of necessity; they live in a white world and in order to meet their needs and wants they must enter that world. Her experience is instructive to her though it does not give her a sense of the day-to-day reality of her students.

Your mother's...

AliceAnn commented, "now you could say your mother shops at Value Village, that was good for violence. Your mother's out in the streets and then for sure they would be fighting, I mean people have their honour" (01.12.98). Amelia replied, it's a very loaded statement in our school too…I'm almost relieved to hear that that happens in another school (01.12.98).

I had a new student come in, not new to the school but new to me, and he is a student who often gets picked on. He's a fairly decent kid but he's picked on by the others and this mother business goes back and forth and he can play the game as well as they do, even though he's a decent kid. You hear the crudest, most vulgar remarks and to stop it you have to go to great lengths. Like whatever behaviour monitoring tools we use in the classroom in terms of trying to maintain control don't work. It almost means a call to the office and then of course the principal gets there and everything's quiet. You know it's useless calling him, in a sense, but that gesture has to be made to break it. It isn't just a school problem, it's a community problem…I am going to try to maintain some kind of classroom atmosphere and if we learn something by chance, ok. The other way, insisting that they work and setting boundaries for them, has been just hell. I don't know whether I've just had enough or what but we're here in school, we're here to learn. That is what your job is and if you refuse to do it I can't make you do it and I know that and they'll blatantly say, you can't make us do it. You're right, I can't. I can't do a thing to force you to do it, learning is by agreement (01.12.98).

That these are young kids' lives, that they're using this in the classroom and it just goes on day in and day out and it is so contrary to how I live my life and my values and the way that I talk and what I want to be in…I know I'm constantly fighting with them and I'm constantly fighting with them because of my principles and values not because I've taken on theirs. Now, on the other hand, I can be in it and not react and not feel any sense of hurt every time it happens, there can be a kind of hurt there but not every time it happens. We are some distance from things becoming violent and I don't shrink back from it, I still stand up to them and I know it's very measured. I'm standing up to them but I'm also watching and every sensing pore in me is reading the situation. I have been able to stand up to them and have nothing happen but it's not without them going almost as far as they can go without things going out of control. You know, this far from your face, yelling in your face, just over top of you, shoulders pulled forward, all sorts of stuff like that. Like the one I laid charges against, he used to swing at me and I swear if he missed me by a half inch that was all and [the swing] had full force behind it (01.12.98).

We have a strike system that you're supposed to use for swearing but I think, my I'd never quit marking those, I would never get to teaching so I tend to overlook it in order to teach. I still try and temper the language in my room and I have an additional factor that makes it more reasonable for the students to temper it or at least I think it does. I share a room with another teacher and we have a line of demarcation, it's a piece of tape on the floor, and that's her side and this is my side and you cannot go on her side if you're my student. They're beginning to respect that. She works with grades one and two so they're just little guys and you might get away with foul language when they're not there but when they come in, it quits. I have this one particular student, Victor, and he uses colorful language all of the time. I say, the little guys are in here, cut it out. He says, they hear it all the time, like it's not just me saying it to them. They hear it no matter where they go; at home people are saying it to them all the time. I said, in this room we're going to do it differently, in this room we are going to try and do better than what it is out there, we're going to have different standards and this talk goes on repeatedly. I just had to laugh. A new student joined us and he said, you better be careful because when [the other teacher] brings those little kids in 'we got standards ya' know,' we can't swear when those little kids come in. It's so much a part of their lifestyle, no matter what it does to my ears, it's a part of their lifestyle. They get very frustrated sometimes. [In the classroom, the students and I] talk of being role models and Victor said, I am so sick and tired of being a role model, when can I quit? And I said, never, never, you can't quit anymore (10.28.97).

If I step back and try to look at what's happening I'm imposing boundaries that they're not used to having imposed and I'm not very flexible with those boundaries. To me, we are a school and therefore we will behave like a school or as close to like a school as we could possibly get. And so I'm imposing those boundaries. So out of their style of life which doesn't have those kinds of boundaries their only defense is to kind of negate your right to have any room to tell them anything and I always finding it interesting and challenging (12.09.98).

[For many years of my marriage] I would not stand up and say, I won't do this. I compromised my values all over the place and it did little good for me, very little good. Now a big chunk of my life is striving for integrity (05.11.98).

We don't swear at home, we've hardly used darn. Now that my kids are living away from home the odd time somebody will say something. Well I hear it instantly, instantly, because the setting is so different, I'm not at school. I hear it there too; it's just that I don't respond to it.... It gets to your inner core in terms of the frustration in not being able to deal with it (01.12.98).

For me that's a big thing in our school, the difference in values and I bring that with me into the classroom, I can't leave it behind. They aren't my birth children but in another sense they are my children and I treat them as I would treat my children, striving *for those unwritten, appropriate kinds of things that will further their movement in society (10.28.97). I believe there needs to be respect for individuals at all levels and to have respect probably involved some values and standards and so my job is to emulate that and respect the students as human beings, in spite of what is happening (04.06.98).*

When people [outside of school] listen to [my stories of school] I react to some of their comments about them because they're hearing a piece of story and they don't have the full context within which it happened. Very often that provokes me to try and expand that picture for them so that they don't stay in their small sighted place with it and working on a reserve I find this constantly happening because of some of the things that happen there. I always think that there is a more normal place in terms of my values and my standards and how I live and how I view life. Sometimes I hunger to go to that more normal place and other times the chaotic nature of this one is so enlivening, you can't grow old because if you stopped responding to it, in the instant,...you'd be run over and squished. So I find when I tell stories I'm always trying to expand [upon the stories of school] because I think they view it from their values and their standards and their principles and don't understand that the setting I'm working in has different ones and we look at them as right and wrong and to some degree there are some things that are wrong but that is their life, if that makes sense.... though I struggle with [a difference in values] when I talk to people outside of the school. I'm defending [the students] and at the same time saying we need to understand what has happened to their society, the decay that is there and what a long, long road it is to rebuild.... You would think that you would appreciate some empathy for how difficult it [teaching] is and then when you get it, it comes in the form of some criticism about what's causing the problem, then I have to defend that as well (10.28.97).

* * *

The time that Amelia has spent with her students, both in and out of school, has given her an opportunity to know something of the students' lives, "it's sad, it's really sad. It's such a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde kind of situation. In every one of those kids I know and have seen just a kid, and a fairly ordinary and decent kind of kid too but then they pull out this [other] side and God help us" (01.12.98).

She understands her values as different from those of the students and in this story it is the students' language that amplifies this difference. What underlies the language use may be what creates a tension for Amelia. I am referring here to her understanding of respect, respect for others and respect for self. "I would say if we hear a word often [on the reserve] respect is the word. We hear that word constantly. I am not sure that anybody has ever stopped and defined for those kids in very specific terms what respect is and I can't envision what it is because very little of their behaviour is representative of respectful behaviour" (01.12.98).

> We talk so much about respect of other people, do we really know what respect is like? …are you respecting these other people? Are you recognizing that it is ok to be someone other than yourself? Are you recognizing that? This is what respect is about. It is more likely about difference than it is about sameness, there's no cost in respecting something the same. It's like that piece out of the Bible, if you forgive someone you love you haven't done much but if you forgive someone who has affronted you and become your enemy you have done much. It is easy to forgive someone you love, it's easy to respect what is the same. Have you any room for what is different? …When we talk about respecting people it means respecting who they are and how they choose to operate their life in a moment when it interacts with us (12.09.97).

She is questioning her acceptance of the students' differences while at the same time questioning their acceptance of the difference she brings to the classroom. At the same time, in dealing with physical assault, she lives out her understanding of respect with the student involved, as I noted in the analysis of the story, "Why don't you quit?"

Striving for integrity is important to Amelia. She walks a fine line in terms of the values to be reflected in the classroom and at times the walk is difficult as she longs for the workplace to reflect her values. At other times she relishes the walk, acknowledging that the chaos that develops from difference can enliven her teaching; in reference to the graduation of one of her classes she says, "it's going to be dullsville after that" (04.06.98). Outside of the school, she is provoked by those who she feels only have a "small sighted place" from which to understand her stories of school and she spends time giving them a fuller context so that they don't have to stay in that place. While on a vacation she engaged in a conversation about her work with a group of fellow travellers and she had this to say about the conversation.

> Maybe because he's a man, when there is a problem there must be a solution. So that's how he spoke about things in terms of the Native situation, you just do this. I say, but what about that, like you can't compensate for that by just doing this. These are people, these are human beings, they have feelings, they need room. Only he wasn't seeing it that way at all and the conversation carried on. By the time we were done I thought, I've said all this; as frustrated as I sometimes am in this setting I find myself defending the people because I really believe they are very misunderstood probably because not many people have the psychological or sociological base to understand what truly happens to a society when it's gone through what this one has gone through and correspondingly, without those bases, don't understand how change is brought about. They have very simple solutions, which aren't solutions at all, and I left there thinking, who am I in this? On one hand I'm wanting to get out, on the other hand I'm defending…it's been very unsettling (04.06.98).

The snapshot that these stories present is one of contradiction, of both clarity and confusion. She describes her work as a "very high energy job" (05.11.98). She says of herself that "it's not like I don't like the kids, I don't like some of what they do…" (04.06.98) however, she also knows that "it gets to some piece of you, inside, where you say, it's time to move on. I've given all of me that I can give here and now somebody new needs to come and do this, I'm not sorry I've done it, I'm not sorry at all that I've done it but for my own well-being I need to move on. I need another, a different, experience" (05.11.98). Her ambivalence on the topic of seeking a different experience is illustrated in the following story.

> We had a conversation, the grade nine boys and I. What a handful and yet they're amazing kids, amazing kids. The conversation actually started before Fred got to the board. He said, I'm sick of you white people in this school, why don't you go back where you came from, like why don't you go to Germany? I said, well because things have gone on too long. I can't just pick up and go back to Germany, it's not an option anymore. It would be almost as difficult for me to go back to Germany as it would be for you to go to Germany. I can't just do that and besides this is Canada and I love Canada and I don't want to leave it.
>
> Fred who is just so challenging, went to write on the board and I said Fred sit down, you don't have permission to get out of your desk, you don't have permission to write on the board, sit down. It's our board, it's our chalk, these are our desks, they are not yours. You don't have the right to say anything about any of these. And I said, I am the teacher, I have the right. Indian Affairs paid for these and they're ours. And I said, but where do you think Indian Affairs got the money? They got it partly from me. Oh no, we don't get any money from you. I said, where do you think they get their money? And here's Dustin who can be just as big a handful, who sometimes screams in my face, ya got a problem, ya got a problem? He says, they do Fred, they do have to pay for it, they have to

> pay income tax and that's where a lot of the money comes from that goes to Indian Affairs. I said, listen to him Fred, he's the same as you are, he knows, listen to him. It's so amazing, in there I saw change. I don't know how Dustin got a handle on this but he is beginning to recognize something beyond himself and it makes me think maybe it's changing and then I think, don't think that, you'll get sucked in again (12.09.97).

AliceAnn's narrative follows. Both she and Amelia refer to their family stories in similar ways. Amelia spoke of her ancestry as a "mixed bag of tricks" (11.18.97). AliceAnn spoke of her parents mixed marriage and said, "I don't know how to define myself…it was confusing but rich" (11.18.97). Like Amelia, AliceAnn is enlivened by the chaotic nature of her teaching practice. In the previous paragraph Amelia commented on how dull it will be at school after one of her classes graduates. In our conversation she pondered her feelings, noting the contradiction between her feelings now and during some of the difficult moments with this class during the year. AliceAnn told her that she (like AliceAnn) was an "adrenaline junkie" (04.06.98). At our next meeting AliceAnn explained adrenaline junkie.

> …I would never pack it [teaching] in and it's not a conscious decision, I just keep going…. To make a personal phone call during the day it has to be highly motivating for me to remember to do that…even in my preps, who thinks of anything else? There's this program on television from Australia called "Adrenaline Junkies" about an emergency trauma unit and I think being in school but also in junior high, if you're an adrenaline junkie that's where you get it (05.11.98).

Difference

Initial differences, a person's colour or racial features
I don't recognize
refer to
comment on
bring up for discussion.

Doesn't labelling difference determine the direction in which a child will journey?
You're only labelling those that are in the minority; so in the staff room I say,
Oh, that white kid

Every single kid should have the same doors opened; children should not have their
future determined by their history.

If I just explain myself a little better will you understand?

My hope is for a time when people can't understand what the fuss is about.

CHAPTER 6

Cultural Heterogeneity: AliceAnn's Narratives of Identity and Classroom Practice

I met AliceAnn in a discussion group at the university. Since that time I have assisted her in a classroom writing project and we have also worked collaboratively on practicum supervision. At the time we met we were both completing education degrees. "I [completed] my BA (Bachelor of Arts) then went into education and I took a course here and there and then I got pregnant and it was fourteen years before I could come back again" (12.09.97). Previous to this she taught for two years in West Africa with CUSO (Canadian University Services Overseas). While at home with her children she taught French at night for seventeen years with the school board and the Faculty of Extension at the university. She also worked as a conference co-ordinator, research assistant and probation officer. Since completing her education degree, she has taught for six years, "the first year I subbed and I worked half time at the probation office" (12.09.97).

Threaded throughout her narrative are the challenges presented by her learning disability, "I can't write. I can form letters, I can print beautifully but I couldn't think at the same time" (12.09.97). She spoke of the exhaustion of trying to write, "you've got all these thoughts and you just know that you're not going to keep it so you leave out a huge chunk and go on…then you're drained. With kids, the teacher will sometimes say, he was working fine and then he got lazy. Well it's not, he just got exhausted" (12.09.97). She also spoke of writing an exam at the university and the difficulty she experienced in having her disability accommodated, "I cried the whole night from the fatigue and humiliation." Her learning disability is woven imperceptibly through her narrative.

Speaking to her current teaching position, she said,

> …when you're in a high needs school you get a bit of a sense of importance and you feel like what you're doing is important in the world. Maybe at another school I wouldn't feel that what I was doing was so very important. And if you're going to get up at 6:00 in the morning and

> go the whole day you have to have a sense that what you're doing is important. …I think part of it also is, this sounds so trite, a kind of investment in the future and you're part of that investment. You want to see these youngsters grow and grow in a positive way because that's the future; you're part of it so it kind of ensures, again, your vitality and also your place in the world or your place in your own small history, [there's] bound to be somebody who remembers me (05.11.98).

You have to listen

The first year I was at Northwood School this terrible, terrible thing happened [to me]. A petition was circulated in the class; Mrs. Albertson discriminates against Native kids, even if she doesn't know they're Native. So, I was beside myself, I was so devastated. A part of my image of myself is that if I would notice that kind of thing I would work on it and I didn't know what to do. I was just heartbroken (11.18.97).

Our own family is integrated so we've been living this life with feet in every culture (11.18.97). I believe that to whom you were born should not determine your destiny and it was our obligation as a society to make absolutely sure that every child who was born could go as far as he or she wanted to go and whatever direction, whatever the cost, and that we wouldn't label kids ever, so we wouldn't say an Indian, a Black. All this labelling I found appalling. In fact, one of my sons said, oh Mom will talk around and around and around before she'll finally say, you see that Chinese guy over there. I always found that was the worst manners possible, to identify somebody that way.... Racism that's a genetic thing, it has nothing to do with the language you speak and so Bulgarians don't like Rumanians, that's not racism, they don't like each other, that's not nice. But once it's a genetic thing then it's race. So we were labelling people as different races when race had nothing to do with it. So if we can't get even get the labelling right , it seemed even more wrong to ever label anybody. In the staff room I could weep, you know 'that big Indian *boy,' 'that little Indian girl.' Not many people do it but whenever it's used as a convenient label, as part of their description, people shouldn't be that way in their own country. You're only labelling those that are in the minority, you're separating them off. So in the staff room I say, oh, you know, that white kid.... A lot of things you see you wouldn't say; it's obvious someone is in a wheelchair, it's not a bad thing. The person' s not bad, they haven't done anything wrong but to be constantly referred to as the kid in the wheelchair, that makes it their identity and that's not the sum of the person. There's just so much more to a person than what you look like on the outside and when you set them apart a lot then it's no wonder that they keep doing it to others. Just because you've experienced racism doesn't make it that you are less likely to be racist. It's a modelling thing and you know my belief that everybody's a racist but what do we do about it (04.06.98)?*

I spoke to one kid and I said, is that true? She said, well I don't think so. Ok, I thought, that's a start but it was vicious enough that the person who circulated the petition had her mother come in, I was grief stricken. So I called my son who had a difficult time going through school; he made everybody miserable and dropped out of school and I told him about it and I said, what do I do? He said, well this is what you do, you tell them to get all the people together that signed the petition, come in the room and tell me what your concerns are, I'm ready to listen. I'm sure not one kid's going to show up but if they do then you have to listen. And they didn't. And then the mother came and I made that offer again and she looked at the staff and said, you know Mrs. Albertson isn't a racist, she's just not a very nice person which was so awful and I didn't know what I was fighting really.

To this day, if I remember it, I'm devastated that someone's perception of me would be that I would discriminate against a certain group because I've always maintained that everybody is racist, you really are. And people that say, I'm colourblind and I don't notice, excuse me, you notice the colour of a sweater someone's wearing. What you do with that information that you take in, when you recognize feelings that are less than worthy inside, and they do happen, you deal with it. You have a talk, you examine yourself and you deal with it so that you don't end up discriminating. I always thought I worked very hard at that (11.18.97).

I grew up in an eastern Canadian city and on my street there were Jewish, Presbyterian, Anglican, Catholic, French Catholic, and Irish Catholic families and everybody had masses and masses of kids....on our street...we were products of a mixed marriage.... Then we moved maybe ten blocks away to a Jewish neighbourhood so my mother was the only French Canadian on the street. She never saw herself as a French Canadian but in that neighbourhood it was clearly defined since we had the biggest family...I don't know how I define myself.... It was confusing but rich.... Then it was complicated because when I was six we went to the Caribbean for a year, for the winter. I was in grade one and so then I had some kind of an image of colour as a difference, like as something else, another added thing.

My father was an assimilationist as is my mother. She believed in the melting pot, she thought that all this ethnic stuff was a big nuisance, like you can enjoy it, you know, having all the restaurants and having Heritage Days. That was all fun for enjoying but let's not make too big a deal of it, we're all in here together. So she truly admired the American melting pot (11.18.97).

We've got to be able to deal with people without putting them in their skin slots. What is a kid who's First Nations, how much do you have to have in you to belong to the group? It's really tough and when we're dealing with our own personal racism we have to look at that. That doesn't mean that when you see somebody you can't notice everything about them but if that has to be the means of identification then once it comes out of your mouth it makes it a place where the person should be and they didn't choose it (04.06.98).

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AliceAnn's childhood, as she described it, was "confusing and rich." Living in and between cultures gave her a unique look at the world. Her body/mind understanding of difference is constructed from the multiple perspectives of her life experiences, experiences set in multicultural neighbourhoods and, for a time, Jamaica as well as her Jewish and French Canadian extended families. She also talked about her experience working at the golf course on a reserve in Eastern Canada and this has provided yet another perspective from which to view the world.

> …none of the others could move as freely as I could and I was quite friendly with one young man and he took me home to meet his mother and he didn't tell her I wasn't a local and so she started to speak to me and, of course, I didn't understand a word. So he said, she's from [another reservation]. But I had a lot of freedom to move around and I never experienced any negative attention whereas the others, many of them blond with blue eyes, didn't have that freedom…they didn't fit in and I did. They were perceived as strangers (05.11.98).

She also speaks of language as a factor in determining her worldview, "if your parents are both operating in a second language or you're operating in a language different from your parents it gives you a different view of the world, I think" (04.06.98). In our conversations AliceAnn took this exploration one step further. She explained how an individual could adopt or adapt a culture.

> If a culture is how you live and you come here and you have nothing to do with [your former culture] and you adopt all the activities going on here you've adopted a new culture and that is your culture. [Or] you keep your culture and you adapt it to the environment. So cultures change. You can, I think, change your culture. Some people are born in the wrong culture for them. You're not locked into it. [Or] you can move between the two [cultures], that's just like a bonus (12.09.97).

During an earlier conversation she gave an example of her thinking on adapting/adopting cultures and how it was lived out in her work.

> I had a kid on probation and he was a First Nations kid and he was cool. The social worker called me and said, he seems to have an inferiority complex. Well I said, yeah he feels pretty inferior. So I'm going to send him to [a school within the public system designated as a First Nations school]. I said, he doesn't want to go. All this kid wanted was to have preppy clothes…and he had the right to want that. The solution should not be, oh you're a First Nations kid so [for] any of your problems you get slotted here. I have to be very careful that I do not slot people (11.18.97).

AliceAnn has embodied a notion of cultural mobility and it serves as a lens through which she views her students.

Her parents' thoughts on assimilation have also influenced AliceAnn. On the subject of how immigrants should take up life in their new country, they favoured the idea of the American melting pot rather than the Canadian cultural mosaic. Expressing her views on the subject of multiculturalism she said, "I don't recognize initial differences. I do recognize the heritage day stuff, which I consider fun, and all those things but not [something] that should determine your future" (11.18.97). AliceAnn's acceptance of the idea of the melting pot is set against official multiculturalism, government policy enacted in 1971. Multiculturalism is an idea entrenched in the Canadian psyche, as Bissoondath (1994) points out, anyone criticizing multicultural policy is labelled a racist; there is little, if any, opportunity for discussion of the unexamined assumptions of multiculturalism. In his examination of The Act for the Preservation and Enhancement of Multiculturalism in Canada (commonly known as The Canadian Multiculturalism Act) he sets out some of those unexamined assumptions,

> that people, coming here from elsewhere, wish to remain what they have been; that personalities and ways of doing things, ways of looking at the world, can be frozen in time; that Canadian cultural influences pale before

> the exoticism of the foreign. It views newcomers as exotics, and pretends that this is both proper and sufficient (p. 43).

Assumptions such as these may have guided AliceAnn's parents in their rejection of multiculturalism and their acceptance of the melting pot. Her parents' experiences of ethnicity / race would also be a factor in her parents' understanding and acceptance of the 'melting pot'. AliceAnn says of her mother, "[she] was the only French Canadian on the street, [she] never saw herself as a French Canadian but in that neighbourhood [it] was clearly defined…because we had five kids in the family" (11.18.97). She talks about this neighbourhood again in our conversation on March 9, 1998, "when we were in this neighbourhood we were the biggest family but the first neighbourhood [in which she lived] was much more integrated and less homogenous but everybody had the same aspirations and dreams." Her words underscore the Canadian understanding of French Canadian and Catholic as terms that are synonymous.

"Our inner guidance comes to us through our feelings and body wisdom first-not through intellectual understanding" (Northrup, 1998, p. 31). AliceAnn's inner guidance is rooted in her childhood experiences. The sense that she has made of her childhood is lived out in her own family, a family she describes as integrated one with "feet in every culture." AliceAnn commented, "if I was ever to pick a symbol of a family, it's a table" and in reference to her nuclear family, "we talked all the time" (11.18.97). Her memory on her body comes, in part, from this talk, this sharing of family stories in both her nuclear family and her family of origin. The table as a family symbol also speaks to her willingness to listen. It is not surprising, then, that when she asks her son for advice about how to deal with charges of racism in her classroom that he tells her to find out their concerns and say, "I'm ready to listen."

Don't you touch me

I have this kid in one of the classes, Cody, and he hasn't been to school much. He freaked out last Friday. A teacher was helping him fix his math paper up, you know, fixing little holes up for him and stuff and the kid says, take your math and just shove it up your ass and stomped out, just enraged and everybody was shocked.

So yesterday we had a really disruptive kid in the class and I was taking him to the office. I can leave the kids, it's not a problem, there's stuff to do and I came back in and one of the girls said, "Cody knocked my books off my desk." And so he came bustling over to tell his side. I said, oh sit down we'll work it out. It was, like, nothing. You fuckin' racist bitch he said, not at me, and I said, I'm afraid I have to ask you to go to the office because I can't accept this. He got up to go and he threw his books. I didn't see that but I saw him lunge at the girl and it was in slow motion but it was so fast. He slapped her upside the head. I've never seen that. I said, come on out. So going down the hall he was screaming all these invectives, you white trash, fuckin' bitches and I put my hand on his shoulder to say, we talked about that, and he screamed, don't you touch me. He'd always responded very well to my doing that. He was punching the locker, when he comes back tomorrow I can only imagine how his fists are going to be. He was in a rage through the halls. When he came back to the class to get his stuff I wouldn't let him in the room, I was afraid. At no time was I afraid for me, not because I'm brave but because I knew that it wasn't directed at me. But I couldn't let him in the class because he's hit a student and so I got his stuff and I gave it to him and he raged.

And you know what it was, he and his brother had been told that if they didn't get any detentions they could see their mother that weekend. And he just projected all the way to the point that he was going to get a detention, he wasn't going to see his mother, and it was all that fuckin' racist bitch's fault. It was shattering. Apparently she'd kicked his desk. I would have said, Lynette do you have anything you'd like to say to Cody? And she'd say, I don't like it when you push my books off the desk. And Cody do you have anything [to say]? Well I don't like it when you kick my desk, Lynette. And it would have ended. That's what he did with the math paper, he immediately saw himself kicked off the basketball team and in jail. He is such a fragile kid. And the kid he hit is no bigger than a minute either.... When I came back [to the classroom] the kids were laughing and yucking it up and I said, look I'm shattered when somebody's in so much pain that this is how they react and I'm going to work at my desk quietly for awhile and that's what I want you people to do. Yeah, right (12.09.97).

I have rules, I have beliefs, not spiritual beliefs, beliefs in what's right and what's wrong and I feel committed to certain causes (02.09.98). With all the strength and respect that you have for other people, that still doesn't cancel out that there are gender issues, there is racism and sexism and it will affect what's happening. And you can't deny history which has molded people and you can't deny in many cases there was horrible racism that these kids experienced and they're going to interpret it that way and react to you. I have to identify myself as a person with absolutely no religion or spiritual feelings so I don't have that to hold me. I can only look at–this is happening and I do, inside myself, react. I can bounce back very quickly but there's no denying that those issues are there and they're popping up their ugly little heads every time you look around. [To deal with those issues] I always feel that if I just explain myself a little better they'd understand. Any situation I have where people aren't able to see my point of view, which is often, I have a moral obligation to hang in there until at least they understand what I'm saying. They don't have to agree, which would be nice if they did, ...but they have to understand and so I, just like a bull in a china shop, keep going (02.09.98).

* * *

In this story, individuals' actions are based upon the way in which they see the world and their enactment of the worlds in their heads set them on a collision course. AliceAnn perceived this incident as minor in nature. Like similar incidents that occurred in the classroom it could be quickly resolved and forgotten. Its resolution would occur through dialogue between the parties involved, dialogue facilitated by AliceAnn. She had no knowledge of what was at stake for Cody as he went from class to class. For him, each incident during the school day, no matter how trivial, might be the one that led to a detention and a detention meant expulsion from the basketball team and the cancellation of a visit with his mother. With so much riding on his behaviour he immediately assumed the worst each time something happened. He did not wait for the teacher's response. He exploded; he could not contain the expectations placed upon him and the emotions they evoked. AliceAnn's fear is a response to his rage, a rage that is uncontrollable. Of the other student involved in the incident AliceAnn says, "…to the little girl, no matter what, you don't deserve that and you don't want her to think that she would deserve that" (12.09.97).

Discussing her teaching practice, AliceAnn said, "I do for these kids what I would have wanted somebody to do for mine…I don't succeed a lot of the time but that's what I set out to do for my students, what I wanted people to do for my children" (12.09.97). She goes on to describe herself as a good launcher (05.11.98), "I can get them started and I can give them skills and build a fair amount of self-esteem so that they have an image of themselves as somebody who can achieve." Seeing herself as a launcher may be related to the choices set out for her and the choices she made. She remembered many visits with her grandmother and said of her grandmother, "her mother told her, get a trade, make sure you can be self-sufficient and so she would always say that to us, and of course, be a teacher or a social worker, something, but have your papers…" (11.18.97). The student's outburst and the ensuing chaos momentarily shattered this image of herself as a launcher.

Give them dreams

At our school we have lots of kids whose parents have not finished high school and I don't feel that I'm doing anything the parents would not want for the children when I say, when you finish high school and you choose where you're going to go and study….

There isn't a parent that doesn't want success for their children and for their child to be able to make a choice. You're not destroying a culture by saying you have a choice, you're going to be a doctor. Now if you decide to be a doctor you can choose where you're going to be a doctor. You can do it in the city, you can do it in the country but you have to be able to do certain things so that you can make that choice. And I don't think there's a single culture that doesn't want that for their children.

I have Richard in my class, a First Nations boy who lives with his grandmother. He has enormous potential, which he was squandering, so I called his grandmother in and she was very comfortable with my dreams for Richard because they were the same as hers. I see that he has potential as a leader and the community recognizes that so there's no trampling on toes and not recognizing him as an individual and an important member of his community but he needs the tools (11.18.97).

I feel that the difference between having a rich life and not a rich life is to have dreams and you've got to give [students] a whole range [just] as I gave my own children, not that they took it, but it was there. And you have to have those dreams and go in one direction and find it and look beyond even what you can ever hope to accomplish or do. I feel that as teachers, well I feel a few things. One of them is to give them dreams but the other thing is that they need a wide range of teachers with different approaches so that each kid can find a teacher that can ignite them. I don't think there's one answer.... Last year one of the kids said, I'm nothing. I said, well as you go through life keep remembering that there was your teacher in grade seven who knew without a doubt that you were going to accomplish your dreams. I gave her a gift and I believe it and she'd never had anybody tell her that there was no ceiling. She came back to school this fall. I was quite thrilled because she was going off somewhere else and she came back where she felt safe (11.18.97).

My own mother grew up in the most reduced circumstances. She was pulled out of school at 14, crying her eyes out, to be sent to Business College so that she could go out to *work. She was the fourth child of eight, this middle kid, just neglected, totally neglected. Her mother, my grandmother, was a wonderful woman and I loved her a lot but I can see now from the stories that my mother, herself, was neglected. Anyway, suffice it to say that after she was married she got a university degree…which I always found very impressive (11.18.97).*

I had a lot of encouragement going to school; it wasn't a big issue. My father wrote out a cheque for the fees, it wasn't a problem. If I had wanted to go to law school that wouldn't have been a problem but I never really had an image of myself as doing that. And I remember once my partner asked, why don't you go to law school? I said, well why don't you? He said, because I want the prestige of being married to a lawyer but I didn't go because I didn't have that image of myself (02.09.98).

* * *

AliceAnn's story of classroom practice was her answer to a question posed by one of the participants, "do you ever think you [are] breaking a bond between parents and children when you were phoning for permission for them to go to this camp?" (11.18.97). She is clarifying two points in her response. Firstly, that giving children dreams does not break a bond between parent and child and her story of Richard is told to exemplify this point. Secondly, she wants to acknowledge that her role as a launcher is just that, her role, and other teachers offer something different to students and that difference is necessary in order to reach all students. On another occasion AliceAnn shared a story from her classroom that also illustrates her desire for all of her students "to go as far as they can."

> I was having them do maps of [the city] and finding the different places and she wasn't doing much. She was really bright…and I said, well you haven't found the university yet and she said, oh and I said, well you have to find the university, you'll be going there. She said, no I'm not. I said, what are talking about, of course you're going to the University of Alberta and she said, no I'm going to Yale (05.11.98).

Hampton (1993), citing Bradley's work, states that, "most Indian parents want their children to be taught the things necessary for success in both the white and the Native worlds" (p. 266). Hampton elaborates on this point, "we need educational leaders who can confidently deal with all aspects of modern society" (p. 266). Reading this reminded me of AliceAnn's story as she speaks to the importance of giving students dreams and providing them with the tools to be successful adults.

She goes on to describe the expectations of public education and the contradictions that arise around assessment.

> We want every person to be able to go as far as they can and it's your job as a teacher to push and pull them and just because a person isn't gifted in the way that's being assessed doesn't mean that they're not able to make a huge contribution, probably even more significant than somebody who maybe got honours all the way through and you don't want to extinguish that spark by labelling them as a nonstar (10.28.97).

Her understanding creates tension in her teaching practice because of the common exams that students are required to write. She describes the exams as a "crummy tool" and "hypocritical" (10.28.97).

Givers and takers

My first year there was such animosity between the most recent immigrants attending our school and the rest of the student population, such animosity. Parents saying, you make excuses for them, what about our kids? You're always on their side, what about us? They came here. Well look, we all did. Such anger, like we had to separate the two [groups of] kids, well for their English too. But it was awful (12.09.97).

It was a big city so on our street it was quite multicultural, there were all these people...and I don't remember anybody who was a postwar immigrant. There were some people from England that came and then they went back after, I guess, rationing stopped.

Now we used to say things like, "Oh looks like a DP" but I don't think we knew what that meant, it was just poor taste. On our avenue everybody was white now that I think about it; black people lived in a particular section, Chinese people lived in a particular section. People came from concentration camps. I remember somebody as a boarder at my grandmother's place. She was very wonderful at sewing and I was at my grandmother's and I think she was making something for a doll and her sleeve slipped back and her numbers showed. So quickly [she pulled down her sleeve], she was so embarrassed and I know that's the basis of why I can't stand tattoos. When people get a tattoo I just see this. So she would have been a displaced person (03.09.98).

In the Social Studies multiculturalism unit my theme has been that each people that are here teach each new group how to survive here, how to manage. And each new group coming in, they bring something too so the more of us that are here helping each other settle in and appreciating each other's gifts the richer we become. So to that end how did the First Nations people, in their generosity, help people survive? They [the new group] never knew weather like this, they didn't know how to go around so how did they do that and what's the good stuff they got in return? Look at that. Then you can always point out that the Iroquois nation provided the foundations for the American constitution and if we consider…that this is the greatest country they owe a lot to the First Nations people. And I try and work that way and I came to this by working it through, by teaching it, and I think that's the philosophy I'm going to live with…. We do talk about what was taken away and bad things but we don't focus on that because when you're in grade seven you're pretty critical, that's the easiest thing. Let's look for some positives and then when we criticize we have enough to go on…. They [students] can all make contributions so we can make a whole. I don't send people [away] feeling bad, I don't send the new immigrants off feeling, boy you're so lucky to be here, you should be grateful. I don't believe I send the First Nations kids off with anything less than enormous pride, or that's my aim. Families who've been here enough that they don't look

> to another area for their heritage, they know also that they brought and they took, so we're all givers and takers. And with that concept I'm comfortable, I'm happy and I feel I can share it generously. I won't let them criticize different groups…. I don't focus on [the negative], rather what have people learned from this? So I hope I am doing no harm (11.18.97).

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Her method of working with the mandated curriculum is to present a more inclusive picture of the subject matter she teaches, to go beyond the facts presented, to look deeper, and to make connections amongst the various topics presented. Speaking of the curriculum she says, "there's so many things I don't know how they expect human beings to learn so much in one shot; you don't even have time for review" (01.12.98).

She speaks of her own background as multicultural. In her classroom work, AliceAnn sets forth an inclusive model of multiculturalism. She presents two lenses, the lens of giver and the lens of taker, so that the students can see themselves as others would see them and as they would see themselves. It is a model for teaching multiculturalism that gives students the opportunity to make connections with other students. AliceAnn told a story of one attempt to embrace that which was offered in the neigbourhood in which she lived.

> So on our street…we were products of a mixed marriage, and so whenever things went wrong, well, what'd you expect they're products of a mixed marriage. Our parents were anti-religion…especially my father so I have this memory…of sitting on the steps on Sunday watching all the lucky kids dressed up and going to church and then they had a Sunday school picnic. So my father mellowed a little bit after awhile but he just wouldn't let us go and it was a big 'to do' when they had the teen dances at the church, going to a dance and you're going to church (11.18.97).

Report cards

To this day I have a terrible time when I'm doing report cards, you know, we have to do those comments. I'm sick to my stomach every time.... I couldn't figure out why, when report cards came, I'd be [working] to the very last minute.... I don't like to leave things too last minute in school because I'm very scattered and I'd be to the very last minute and I'd always think of this boy but I didn't make the connection. I'm terrified and we have to do narratives now. You give a mark and then you have to write, and so you might write, this person needs to work on paragraphing and stuff. I'm sick. I feel that you have an obligation to be specific, on the other hand, what if I make a mistake? I mean, it's terrible (10. 28.97).

When I taught in West Africa I marked a whole bunch of papers and I was giving them back to kids, calling their names, and I handed a kid something with my left hand and it was a failing mark. He came to me and said, did you give it to me with your left hand because it was such a bad mark? Like this was the grossest insult I could have committed because you only use your left hand for bodily functions which are different from your eating because there isn't enough water, so keep both hands separate. So you see a little kid reaching for food with the left hand, and they're slapped and the hand's put away and it's put in the right hand. So this was like a humungous insult and how many other times do we do those things, I mean I was lucky the kid came and talked to me, straightened me out.

[Another] time I had this kid, he was very, very funny. After awhile, I admit, he got on my nerves; we were doing French verbs, this is very important stuff, so there's no room for humour. I was doing the comments on his report card and I wrote, this boy's a comedian. Didn't think a thing of it, not a thought. When I came back from the long Christmas vacation he said, oh Miss you never should have written that. I said, what? He said, about the comedian; they took me in a room and they tied me on a table and they beat

> *me.... I'd always think of this boy [every time I did report cards] but I didn't make the connection (10. 28.97).*

* * *

AliceAnn's memory on her body presents itself each time she does report cards. Her procrastination serves to put off the ensuing emotions, emotions that she did not always connect to her earlier experience in West Africa. This story was one that occurred early in AliceAnn's teaching and I believe that it has, in some ways, served as a marker for her teaching. The stories she told provided her with lessons in cultural sensitivity that she has not forgotten. The events that occurred after the story were just as dramatic and served to emphasize the importance of her role as a teacher.

> …we went to a service at the Anglican church and they had seventeen hymns before they got to the Christmas service so I went out with a friend and [we] were walking and it was the only time there was ever any threatening thing that happened. People surrounded us and it was getting a little bit frightening…and I said, oh we have to go and they started being rather loud and boisterous and this voice said, leave her alone she's my teacher. And it was that kid. So you just never know. He had an enormous respect for teachers and I guess his parents did too (10.28.97).

When I asked the women about ideas they would like me to take to a conference AliceAnn responded, "find out if there's anybody else working with a group and see where we can all meet after this is over because that would be such a rich experience…you start building a relationship and then break up; it's too difficult. I always like to go steady" (04.06.98). She speaks of a rich experience and that comes from the women's thoughtfulness about their work. In turn, the richness of our shared conversations contributes to the women's thoughtfulness about their work. The image this creates is one of overlapping and ever enlarging circles. She is also expressing the idea that we are not finished, cannot be finished; her work in schools, like that of the other women, continues. Their stories continue to unfold, to be told, lived, retold and relived. Her words remind me that there are no conclusions however there are ideas for consideration. The chapter that follows begins that process as it weaves together the women's threads of identity.

CHAPTER 7

Weaving Together the Threads of Identity

The purpose of this chapter is to broaden the understanding of identity developed by the women in the study. It is my attempt to weave together the threads of identity to present a more holistic sense of the women's identities. Their individual stories, presented in the preceding chapters, focus mainly on the construction of their raced identities. Race was the thread I snagged rather than severed from the stories they tell and, in this chapter, my exploration of the multiple threads of identity of which they spoke–race, ethnicity, class, spirituality and gender are woven together so as to ground their raced identities. The threads of (dis)ability, age and sexuality were also present but less pervasive in our conversations and therefore I am simply acknowledging rather than exploring them in this chapter. By weaving together the multiple threads of identity, I am presenting a more nuanced understanding of white, an understanding that creates a "particularity and limitedness" to whiteness (Dyer, 1997, p. 4). Wray & Newitz (1997) state that it is differences within whiteness that "may serve to undo whiteness as racial supremacy, helping to produce multiple, indeterminate, and anti-racist forms of white identity" (p. 4). Contextualizing raced identities in this exploration of identity reinforces differences within whiteness and serves, in some measure, to produce multiple forms of white identity. It is a necessary beginning.

While some of the material I present is not new to you, the reader, it is put together differently than the previous chapters so as to feature the interconnectedness of aspects of identity (Blair, 1995; Collins, 1990; Frankenberg, 1993; hooks, 1990; Lorde, 1984; Ng, 1993; Pratt, 1991). Telling and retelling the stories gives us a way to look at the world that is "more accurate, complex, multilayered, multidimensioned, more truthful and in acknowledging this...mak[ing] a place for things to be different" (Pratt, 1991, p. 33). I begin the exploration of the multiple threads of identity with a retrospective on time and space because of their importance to each woman's understanding of 'self.' Included in the first retrospective are the participants' comments on class. The remaining retrospectives explore ethnicity, spirituality and gender.

Retrospective I: Time and space

The classroom and life stories we told represent the "tip-of-the-iceberg" (Northrup, 1998; Frankenberg, 1993), "incomplete stories angled toward my questions and each woman's ever-changing sense of self and of how the world works" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 41). Each woman presented this sense of her 'self' in remarks that sometimes prefaced her stories. They would explain where they had been in relation to where they are now. For example, to explain her spirituality, Amelia described her "long spiritual walk that started…probably 1982" (02.09.98). Elizabeth stated, in our discussion of spirituality, "I considered myself a feminist at one time…[now] it doesn't matter. I would say I'm beyond that, it's not an issue any longer" (02.09.98). The women's remarks served to contextualize their present 'self' understandings. They were addressing the ontological question of 'who am I?' by focussing on 'who am I becoming?' Their responses bring to mind a journey in which identity is negotiated along the way, negotiated within the various social contexts that one has the opportunity to explore. Elizabeth did speak of her life as a journey, summing up her comments by saying, "I think that's been my journey" (02.09.98).

The women's sense of space was influenced by their fathers' immigration to Canada. Their gaze was partially that of their fathers'. For example, Amelia said, "from my dad particularly…a great sense of [family] history" (11.18.97). Both Elizabeth and Amelia grew up on farms in western Canada. Amelia speaks of the juxtaposition between urban and rural that reinforced her understanding of class as she spoke of urban "social circles" and "across the track syndrome" (12.09.97). Elizabeth alludes to one difference living in a rural community made in her life when she said, "there were only about two Ukrainian families and so if there aren't too many then you're kind of welcomed and you're considered, not an oddity, but novel" (11.18.97). AliceAnn grew up in a large, eastern Canadian city. Her urban, eastern Canadian life stories were rooted in Jewish and French Canadian cultures. She also lived one year in the Caribbean. Amelia's and Elizabeth's life stories were rooted in the experiences of German and Ukrainian immigrants.

At times each woman spoke of her own sense of feeling different, of being 'other' in the community in which she lived. For Amelia and AliceAnn this became the base from which they viewed more recent immigrants to their communities. For Elizabeth, being 'other' predominated her childhood and hence her worldview. Immigration patterns, including that of their families, played a role in each woman's understanding of race.

Retrospective II: Ethnicity

In our second conversation, Amelia was speaking of the influx of German immigrants into her community. As the daughter of immigrants she understood that these immigrants were accepted within her familial boundaries but "once you got out into the other setting, then, to a degree I fell into much of what the white…" (11.18.97). Her words trailed off, however the scenario she presents uses white to refer to the larger community in which she lived. Once she left the farm she felt that she became white like the townsfolk and looked down on the immigrants.

In Amelia's experience, being white was associated with class and the class distinctions were clearly demarcated. As a "struggling farm family" (11.18.97) she commented "I knew exactly where I fit" (12.09.97). This is also true for Elizabeth who commented on my introduction to the study, "I found it strange to call myself white, earlier ... I'd never considered myself as one of [the majority]" (04.06.98). For her white means majority or dominant culture and during the last half of the twentieth century in Canada that refers to Anglo-Saxons, not Ukrainians. Her ethnicity is what stands out in her life stories and the repeated incidents of discrimination she experienced both created and reinforced her otherness.

AliceAnn speaks of her racial identity as confusing but rich; she stood with her feet in different family cultures. As she told her life stories she focussed on the multicultural milieu in which she grew up. It is in a later conversation, when we viewed our school yearbooks, that she made reference to whiteness. She described the street on which she lived by saying, "…everybody was white now that I think about it; black people lived in a particular section, Chinese people lived in a particular section" (03.09.98).

Retrospective III: Spirituality

At the end of our fourth meeting, January 12, 1998, when the tape recorder had been turned off and we putting away the dishes, Amelia mentioned that religion/ spirituality was an important part of her identity. I acknowledged that spirituality had been a topic in discussions about my research proposal and we agreed to spend our next meeting discussing it. For both Elizabeth and Amelia, spirituality is an integral part of their identity. For Amelia, "this core thing is very critical in my philosophy and my belief system about life" (02.09.98). She spoke of her spiritual journey and said, "people can have very defined boundaries that are given out by whatever church institution they are a part of…and there's probably a time that's needed as we struggle to give our lives definition and boundaries and then we grow beyond that…" (02.09.98). Her spiritual journey has grown beyond the religious institution where the journey began. Elizabeth refers to "life giving spirit" and says, "that's what we're really put on this earth for, to be life giving, to have life given to us" (02.09.98). In our discussion of spirituality AliceAnn said, "I have to identify myself as a person with absolutely no religion or spiritual feelings…" (02.09.98). Integral to her identity is her sense of herself as a "strong feminist" who has "rules, beliefs in what's right and wrong and feels committed to certain causes" (02.09.98). The principles of AliceAnn's feminism and Amelia's and Elizabeth's spirituality help to guide their classroom practice.

Retrospective IV: Gender

In our first research conversation, October 28, 1997, they addressed gender in a discussion of mothering, not in answer to a direct question but as an explanation of the way in which they worked with their students. Amelia, speaking of her students, said "…they aren't my birth children but in another sense they are my children and I treat them as I would treat my children, striving for those unwritten, appropriate kinds of things that will further their movement in society" (10.28.97). She goes on to say that "the bottom line…in terms of her work with kids is totally dependent on building relationships…[as it is] with our own children" (10.28.97). AliceAnn replied by saying,

> …I see that as the key thing when you said, I treat them as my children. You can go outside and crab to everybody about how worried you are about your children and maybe they were a disappointment but it's certainly not acceptable for somebody to come and be supercritical about your children…it's the sense that they are family and we're working it through. If I'm there I don't feel anybody has the right [to discipline the class] because they don't know the whole story and you feel a need to protect them…You do get that sense of the family, I tell the kids this is the homeroom, we protect each other and you have to give them that so that they can go out and make their own family later (10.28.97).

Elizabeth made reference to gender in terms of staff differences, "I find it quite a challenge because at times [the men with whom I work] look at students a little bit differently than I do and that idea about defending the students to me that's almost a mother thing to defend children; it doesn't matter whose they are. You feel it inside, it's sort of an emotion, I think" (10.28.97). In a later conversation Amelia commented, "I'm not sure when I'm at school today whether I'm a mother or a teacher or whether they're different" (12.09.97). The idea of a "blurred image" (Kennedy, 1992, p. 104) comes to mind in Amelia's description of herself, an image of 'self' with "both mother and teacher acting as a unity" where responses to students are "born of many years of knowing, knowing of and in the body…" (Kennedy, 1992, p. 104). As our conversations continued over the course of the research we discussed our career paths and discovered that we had interrupted teaching careers to be at home with our children; AliceAnn taught in the evening during this time.

AliceAnn spoke about her experiences within an integrated family, one "with feet in every culture" (11.18.97) and in a later conversation said,

> …the blaming and naming is what I believe is causing many, many children to be grief stricken…. No matter how their parents set up the household to protect them, you can't. They go out into the big world and they are constantly bombarded with questions that build into a sense of something that's really important whereas the most important thing is to be part of a family (05.11.98).

Like AliceAnn, Lazarre (1996), a mother of a racially blended family, writes of dispelling the notion that racial tensions would stop outside the door of her home; "race, racial identity, racism, and African American history and politics all are recurring motifs in our separate identities as well as our joined family life" (p. xix). AliceAnn's stories of mothering are reflected in her teaching as she tries to teach in the way she wanted teachers to work with her children.

As a framework for understanding their lives, gender played different roles for each participant. AliceAnn called herself a "strong feminist" (02.09.98) and viewed problems presented to women as systemic, "there were many, many things in society that contributed to a woman developing that image of herself that would allow her to make those choices which caused unhappiness" (02.09.98). Elizabeth says "I considered myself a feminist at one time. It doesn't matter. I would say I'm beyond that, it's not an issue any longer" (02.09.98). In what she describes as moving beyond feminism Elizabeth states, "it bothers me when I hear that it's just women who can't attain because of the world we live in. It's men also that don't always reach their full potential, depending on social status, where you start from. We don't live in a perfect world so the most you can hope to do, I think, is to contribute your part" (02.09.98). Amelia commented on the two different points of view, "I look at the things that happened to me that might be viewed from a feminist point of view. I see it more as me lacking wholeness. For who I am now I would never have done what I did but it's because I'm different now not because I see it as a woman thing" (02.09.98). Both Amelia and Elizabeth acknowledge gender differences, for example Amelia says, "…we are more nurturing because we are women and particularly when we have children, it's just like it's in your blood…" (10.28.97). The difference in the women's viewpoints centres on the difference between a systemic approach to understanding women's issues and an individual approach to understanding women's issues.

Retrospective V: A reflection on the construction of my identity

My life stories exemplify Lazarre's (1996, p. 56) words, "*whiteness is*." Whiteness existed as an unexamined way of being in the world. The words 'whiteness is' subsume differences amongst individuals. Its unexamined existence can be made visible by placing our stories side by side so that we can begin to 'see' whiteness in its multiplicity of forms. The students with whom I worked began this process with me and it has continued in this research.

Reflecting on the stories I told, I developed an understanding of how "w*hiteness is*" (Lazarre, 1996, p. 56) came to be my way of being in the world. During our last research conversation I talked about Mura's (1996) story of growing up Japanese American. Thinking about what he had to say, I commented

> I've been thinking about the impact of World War II and the Depression on our lives. So much of what we have talked about is the immigration after the war. When I think of my own family I think of my father's attempts to create economic security. Having lived through the Depression, having fought in the war, he's buying into a certain kind of economic security and to do that there's this pushing away of the past and what that represented or what was remembered of it and a focus on the future–we want to be upwardly mobile, we want to have a home, a single family dwelling in a suburban kind of setting, we want to have a secure job, and we want to give our children what we didn't have ourselves. Do the memories, the stories he might tell, take us back to a time that we don't want to remember, or will the memories drag us down and we won't be able to be successful in this new post World War II era? It creates a kind of rootlessness, you have a void and so what is out in the culture fills you up. As you take in the cultural messages, there is nothing for this information to bump up against, it goes unquestioned (05.11.98).

My thoughts reflect some of the factors that I think set a context for both my invisibility and the difficulty I experienced in becoming visible in the classroom. Listening to both the children's and the participants' stories gave me an opportunity to develop an understanding of the construction of my raced identity.

The weaving together of the multiple threads of identity, however partial, serves as a backdrop for the chapter that follows. The women's life stories act as well upon which they draw to construct their stories of classroom practice.

CHAPTER 8

Retelling Our Stories

But if telling stories is a hard task, retelling stories is even more difficult. Retelling requires a vivid imagination as people try to rethink their stories in the context of the stories of others with whom they interact.
–Clandinin & Connelly (1998, p. 252)

This chapter draws on the common threads that emerged in the participants' work in classrooms. Weaving together the common threads created a dissonance with my classroom stories and I began to think about the difference between their stories and mine. Thinking in that in-between space, I began to conceptualize an understanding of classroom work that encapsulated the work of the participants in their respective classrooms.

I begin by presenting the common threads I discovered in their classroom practice. What I see in each of the participant's stories as compared to my own is a different way of working with students in classrooms. The difference is seen in the conversations that Amelia has with her students, in the curriculum adaptations that AliceAnn presents to her students and the sense of the students' community and culture that Elizabeth seeks in her work. They acknowledge and work with their students to explore and understand the raced identities within the classroom. They also explore the impact of their approach on their work in the classroom, specifically in the areas of discipline and curriculum.

The difference in approaches between the participants and myself is not a matter of absence/presence in my teaching practice. Rather, it is in the participants' embrace of their particular methodologies compared to the tentativeness I felt as I worked with different approaches. Their actions are imbued with a sense of forthrightness about their particular courses of action. They have thought about how they work with difference in their classrooms and translated that into specific classroom practices. Amelia's classroom discussions "make apparent difference and cherish that difference" (11.18.97). AliceAnn and Elizabeth speak of downplaying difference. They do explore difference but situate that exploration within curriculum and the community.

I then explore the concept of liminality as a way of talking about the participants' work in their classrooms. Liminality is an idea that arose out of the language they used to describe their work in classrooms. They spoke of working *with* the chaos and energy present in their classrooms. Liminality is a concept I have explored in my own life and I describe that exploration to situate the understanding that I am developing of liminal space in this chapter. I end with an exploration of story in liminal space.

Common Thread I: Classroom discipline

The participants agreed on the impact of race on classroom discipline. AliceAnn began the conversation by saying, "when it is an interracial situation then it's turned into something more than it is so that when you react you're not being supportive, you don't care about self-esteem and if it's not interracial then you're just a mean, old bitch and they never liked you anyway but it doesn't get turned into anything. I've been found sadly lacking by all culture groups" (02.09.98). Amelia agreed and described the "something more" that AliceAnn referred to as "inflammatory undercurrents" (02.09.98). Elizabeth responded by saying, "we must have an awful lot of self-esteem then if we can keep going through all of this. We're the ones that try and find good in things…I think you have to grow into that though" (02.09.98). Their conversation presents the problematic face of discipline in their classrooms. That they attend to this dimension of classroom discipline is important; each of the women understand the inflammatory undercurrents and are prepared to work with those undercurrents, to address feelings engendered by raced identities. They are also able to situate the students' responses within those undercurrents so that they are not overwhelmed by them. Elizabeth offered a cautionary note in that regard and it is an important one; teachers grow into that way of thinking about classroom discipline and even then the participants' stories give evidence to the fact that this is not a simple, straightforward step.

Common Thread II: Classroom dynamics

Two of the teachers in the study, AliceAnn and Amelia, spoke of the chaos and energy of their classrooms. AliceAnn refers to herself as an "adrenaline junkie" (04.06.98) because "the constant excitement and energy, even though it was very draining, also keeps you going, you want to see what the end is going to be…like I would never pack it in…there's also the great fun of every day learning something new, and every day getting a little reward and even in the toughest days there isn't a day you don't get some reward, something" (05.11.98). She acknowledged the support of the principal as an important component of her work. Amelia speaks of "the chaotic nature" (10.28.97) of her school, and her reference to the energy she finds in her workplace continues throughout our conversations, "…heading into the mid fifties, I often say that it would be absolutely impossible to grow old here, like you'd get run over if you did, so it ensures your own vitality and youthfulness because of the nature of the setting" (05.11.98). She experienced various degrees of administrative support in her classroom work because she worked with more than one principal in her tenure at the school.

The teachers provided an opportunity for students and teachers alike to explore their responses to one another, their sometimes angry responses. I heard in the women's stories a willingness, each in their own way, to work with rather than against the chaos and energy, including that which accompanied students' anger. They did not shut down or avoid the dialogue that was necessary nor did they demand order and calm before beginning such a dialogue. They moved into the energy and worked with it. Working this way was physically demanding and sometimes physically dangerous yet they understood their role in these eruptions so that they could gauge the danger and work within that determination as well.

Speaking of the energy in her classroom Amelia commented, "I'm at a loss. I don't normally run into kids that I can't meet somehow. I can meet them at times so that's a real challenge for me but on the other hand, my, what you endure to keep trying to succeed at the challenge" (01.12.98). She is addressing the downside of her students' energy, the difficulties it presents physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. She says of herself that she speaks more negatively than she used to, "I'm aware of that, I don't like that but I don't know how to change the situation" (01.12.98). She goes on to describe a pivotal point in her understanding of her work.

> I decided something at the end of November and if I were to name it I think it would be along the lines of this is an awful and difficult situation and I've just got to work with the situation, let go of other stuff that we normally strive for and just work with the situation. And I felt a lot better (01.12.98).

A part of working with the situation, for Amelia, is "having things mapped out about where I go next" (01.12.98). She described her teaching situation as "a hopeless and helpless situation" (01.12.98) and yet, at times, she is hopeful, "these boys are challenging and I want to hang in there to meet the challenge; I have that hope that in spite of four and half months having passed that we can still get there" (01.12.98).

Elizabeth situates herself in a more neutral position. She does not speak of chaos and the disruptions that occur in her classroom are just that, disruptions. When a disruption is related to race she said, "if I hit it [racism] right on, straight on, there's not too much difficulty with it, I don't think" (11.18.97).

My response to chaos was the opposite. "How can you [make a difference] when there's such chaos around you? That's where I feel responsible. Once that chaos is quieted, once there is some sense of order and togetherness and community, ok" (01.12.98). There is a sense, both in the words and in my body, that I would not work with the chaos and energy. Like AliceAnn and Amelia I understood the students' anger as related to race but for me, acknowledging that anger and working with the chaos and energy it foments would mean acknowledging the classroom as a racialized place. For the children, it already was a racialized place; for me, the invisibility of whiteness…enabled me to stand as an unmarked, normative body (Wray & Newitz, 1997), a body not fully comprehending the meaning of race. It is in "working with the children [that I] have come to understand I too have a race" (11.18.97).

Common Thread III: Curriculum

There is a tension in each woman's classroom between the demands of curriculum and the students' need to make sense of what is happening to them within the raced relations of the classroom. This dilemma was sometimes addressed through curricular adaptations (AliceAnn's story, 'Givers and takers') and sometimes the curriculum was set aside (Amelia's story, 'White man'). In Elizabeth's story "Maybe that's my goal" she is acknowledging the cultural elements of her students' experience and the sense of responsibility she feels to accommodate those experiences within mandated curricula. She speaks to systemic issues and situates some of her responses to students within this systemic framework.

> I don't think we're clear on what we expect out of our education system. And I think that's part of the problem we're experiencing in our education system with what's happening right now. I'm so fed up with the whole system of marks and schools and school boards and premiers and parents that don't parent their kids…I'm really in a bad place right now…I've lived long enough to know these things pass (10.28.97).

Common Thread IV: Tools for understanding difference

The participants acknowledge difference and both suggest and question possibilities for working with students so that we can begin to understand our raced identities. Elizabeth, in sharing a life story, went on to say, "somewhere as human beings we are all the same, but we all have different backgrounds, we all have different places, we all have different stories…the more I can be open to them [students' stories] the better it is for both of us" (11.18.97). Amelia commented, "I have no problem when a child yells racism, in a sense, from the historical sense of what's happened, I understand why they could or would. But then how do we live beyond that, how do we get over it? It's easy for me to sit here and say this as a white person and as a majority but to be in their shoes I don't know" (04.06.98).

> Working with difference in the classroom begins with a recognition that the classroom cannot help but be, at times, chaotic, confusing, and disordered, a place of pain, denial, anger, and anxiety–all of which we expect, we have to expect, when challenging others and ourselves to examine, even simply to reveal, the ways in which all sorts of racisms have inflected our/their identities. The vulnerability to which we expose ourselves and our students is enormous; and the work in the classroom is often physically, emotionally, and intellectually exhausting (Srivastava, 1997, p. 121).

The teachers in the study have come to understand the work in their classrooms in a way that is similar to Srivastava. How might this work be conceptualized such that other teachers would be willing to enter into the chaos that sometimes arises in an examination of race in classrooms?

Perspective I: Classrooms as liminal spaces

Over time I began to conceptualize the classroom as a liminal space. Would an understanding of classrooms as liminal spaces create a broader understanding of the function of that space such that teachers could begin to work with rather than against the raced identities of the classroom? Liminality creates a space for working with the chaos, pain, denial, anger and anxiety that accompany both the revelation and examination of raced identities. The section that follows explores the concept of liminality, and its connections to schooling.

Limen[1] means threshold and liminal space means related to or situated at the limen. It is the space between what was and what is to be. Driver (1991), whose work builds on that of the authropologists Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1986), describes liminality as "the character of being neither here nor there but 'in between' " (p. 159). Liminality is a part of ritual. A rite or ritual is a method of accomplishing something in the real world and ritual processes are essential to the self-regulation of humanity (Driver, 1991). Liminal rites are one of the rites of passage described by Van Gennep (1960). He descibes the rites of passage as "the ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another" (p. 10) and were so named from his analysis of ritual behaviour. He subdivided the rites of passage into rites of separation (preliminal rites), transition rites (liminal, or threshold, rites), and rites of incorporation (postliminal rites). Driver (1991) says of liminality that it belongs to all rituals as such, not just Van Gennep's rites of passage, specifically the transition rites. To explain liminality as a part of a ritual Driver (1991) states,

> when people engage in ritual activity, they separate themselves, partially if not totally, from the roles and statuses they have in the workaday world. There is a threshold in time or space or both, and certainly a demarcation of behavior, over which people pass when entering ritual. The day-to-day world, with its social structure, is temporarily suspended (p. 159).

This broader definition highlights what some consider the problematic nature of liminality because it creates both the time and space to play with possibilities not yet imagined in rituals. This behaviour can lead to "a weakening of state control over people's ideas, emotions, and behavior. …[so] by education and practice, then, much of the liminality of ritual comes to be suppressed" (Driver, p. 159). The double-bind this presents to teachers is a difficult one with which to work. Incorporating liminality in the educational practices or rituals that are set out to suppress liminality creates an onerous burden for teachers.

The experience of ritual in middle-class, Western societies is one where rituals are kept "close to the social shore, so to speak. We do not often let them head for high water, and this is our great loss. …Perhaps we do not want any strong reminder of a 'generic human bond….' Dream of a common humanity, especially when ritualized and therefore brought into experience, can threaten a socially privileged way of life" (Driver, 1991, p. 165). Staying close to the shore is not risky, the shore is what is known and by staying with what is safe and secure we can avoid the messiness, or the adventure, of heading for high water, for the unknown. The maintenance of the status quo excludes many individuals from taking part in the rituals of middle-class, Western society. The maintenance of the status quo also prohibits the creation of new rituals, 'ceremonial patterns' to deal with life in the twenty-first century.

> Ours is an age that needs both the marking of known ways that are worthy of repetition and the groping for new ways in situations with scant precedent. Humanity's ritual traditions are rich but they were not devised to deal with the split atom, nor space flight, nor the hole in the ozone layer. Neither were most of them fashioned to uphold sexual, racial, cultural, and social-class equality. When we do not know what to do, confronted with challenges that baffle and frighten us, we have to rehearse in the dark, so to speak, without a script. We have then to improvise on the basis of gut feelings, following primal motivations (Driver, 1991, p. 50).

Driver's call for new rituals accompanies his call for fuller engagement with liminality in our present rituals because with liminality comes the possibility of new ways of being in the world. Similar thoughts are shared by Bateson (1994) who calls for improvisation, for learning along the way. Heilbrun (1999) says, in reference to women's lives, "…a life without danger, with no question about what the future may hold, is not a life, it is a carefully structured drama, a play in which our parts are written for us. The threshold, on the contrary is the place where as women and as creators of literature, we write our own lines and, eventually, our own plays" (p. 102).

Perspective II: Ritual and school

Utilizing Van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage, I am immediately aware of the rituals that accompany the preliminal rites as children begin various stages of their formal education. I am aware, too, of the sometimes elaborate postliminal rites that take place at certain points in a child's educational journey, particularly high school graduation although it is often preceded by other graduation ceremonies at points along the way, for example, kindergarten, grade six and grade nine. These are well-established rituals that children look forward to as a part of their experience of schooling. What is evident in the foregoing examples is that "in specific instances these three types [of rites] are not always equally important or equally elaborated" (Van Gennep, 1960, p. 11). It is the liminal or threshold rites that are not equally important or equally elaborated. It is the nature of liminality that keeps us from engaging more fully with it. Liminal space is the in-between space, the space between what was and what might be, where one engages with future possibilities. Its apparent lack of structure is both its strength and its weakness, a strength because of what it offers to those who engage with it and its weakness because, in the structured society in which we live, there is a fear of the chaotic.

In some ways, schools already serve as liminal spaces, a threshold for children, a space between the family and society, a space between the private and public, a space between childhood and adulthood. I may be able to conceptualize the space as liminal based on Van Gennep's description, but in reality it is highly structured, leaving little or no space for the 'playful and imaginative.' Driver's broader definition of all ritual as partially liminal does not change my conceptualization of classroom space as one that leaves little or no space for the 'playful and imaginative.'

We embody the rituals of school, they are etched as memories on the body from the time we enter school until the time we graduate. Our bodies are molded to the rituals of school, lived out in its temporal, curricular, evaluative, behavioural and relational structures. The rituals of school stay close to the social shore. Attempts to head for high water are quickly named as transgressions. Attempts to write a different script go unheard in the cacophony emanating from societal demands of schools.

Yet, the teachers in the study have created a liminal space in their classrooms as they engage with students. They amended or suspended the taken for granted rituals to allow for the emergence of something new in the imaginative interplay between students and between students and teacher. I describe their work as imaginative because their classrooms are spaces where raced identities are acknowledged, explored and sometimes reconciled. This is a huge undertaking in schools where rituals to maintain the status quo predominate.

Perspective III: Curriculum as ritual

Elizabeth stated, "We have to take a look at our curriculum, who puts our curriculum together, isn't it just the privileged that we're talking about?" (04.06.98). It is a form of ritual that works for the privileged class to which Elizabeth is referring. None of the teachers in the study work with the privileged class and each one of them tells stories of the problematic nature of curriculum in their classrooms. The teachers try to create a space to address what matters to students, sometimes at the moment of telling and sometimes within the curriculum. However, time and resources are in short supply. One of our research conversations illustrates the dilemma for AliceAnn and Amelia (04.06.98). At the beginning of our research conversation AliceAnn explained a situation that had arisen between herself and one of her students. She is expressing concern for the student and for herself in her attempt to work out a plan that she feels is best for both of them.

AliceAnn: Somebody else was minding my class when we had the open house and the kids were awful. I said, tell me the names of the disappointments and I've chastised everybody because we're all in this together…. They had to write a letter of apology, they had to make it right with her. So one kid said, well it wasn't fair I shouldn't have to do it, I didn't mean anything. So most of the kids worked it out and I said, well if you didn't mean to do it or there was a different interpretation let her know but you make it right with her because she was a guest and you know how I feel. They [letters of apology] all came in, no problem. One kid said I'm not going do it. I said, of course you're going to do it. He says, no. So I called his grandmother. I said he'll stay in 'til he does it. Well, she then remembered what an awful person I was and how miserable I was. I was shocked that the kid wouldn't do it because he'd have come around, realized he'd been wrong and make it right. And then he wrote that he had lost his option and it was not a nice letter to her so I said, you have to write a letter to make it right, not to berate her, she did nothing wrong. So I said you can do it after school but I won't give you an H so you don't have to go to the homework detention room, just write it and you can go home. He said, can I go get my stuff? I said, sure. He took off and there is nothing I can do with this kid now. He doesn't have to do a thing. He doesn't have to open a book, he doesn't have to do anything because his grandmother [stepped in]. I'm in shock, I've looked after this kid.

Merle: So she's telling him he doesn't have to do anything.

AliceAnn: I'm an awful person, this may be true, but not to him.

Amelia: So what happens with this, does it go to the principal?

AliceAnn: Well, that's how I found out. I kept trying to think, what is it I might have done because I'll never do that again. One of the things I do is I say, consider yourself smacked upside the head. So I'm not going to do that, I wouldn't, you know. They'll say oh, and I say no, no, no, this is a metaphor. And then the other thing I do is I say, you need a noogie and I'll do this [using her knuckles to touch a kid's head]...and for some kids that's all they need for the day to go well. So I might have done that to him, he'd be one of the ones…'cause I would never do it if someone was off the wall.

Amelia: You gauge when you do that?

AliceAnn: It's like, you need an attitude adjustment. So maybe it's that but I don't think so. And then the other thing I think is that I talk with my hands and one time some kid walked past [and got hit] and it may have been him but I don't think so. I said, oh my goodness you have to stay out of the way of the French teacher. I'm not going to talk to him about it, can you imagine, they'd say I'm trying to influence him or something. That's a whole new thing...when teachers are accused of doing terrible things, kids could be lying.

Amelia: So, what's happening with this? You said the principal told you, is that correct?

AliceAnn: I said, I'll phone the parents. She said no, don't, leave it alone, don't inflame it, don't get into anything with the kid. I asked her if she'd transfer him to another class.

Amelia: Really?

AliceAnn: I would still teach him Language Arts but I'd have less contact and we would say to the parents, maybe he could be happier.

Amelia: Oh and see when I had my assault charge the principal asked if it was ok for him to come in the room. I said absolutely, he isn't going anywhere else.

AliceAnn: I don't know, in this case I just think the poor boy is not going to do any school work. It's Language Arts and Social he has me for.

Amelia: How long ago?

AliceAnn: Well apparently this might have happened in September.

Amelia: No, no, how long ago since you've been accused?

AliceAnn: Oh just before we went on Spring Break.

Amelia: Oh, I'd give it some time.

AliceAnn: It's pretty unpleasant.

Amelia: Oh yeah, no question about that.

AliceAnn: I say life is too short. He would have a different Social Studies teacher.

Amelia: But what can you give him that he wouldn't have if he got a different Social Studies teacher? You can give him acceptance in spite of what's happened. And to me, I think that is a powerful, powerful tool.

AliceAnn: Yeah, but I'm not very big at that. I can get over most things very quickly but this, see I'm just so vulnerable. It's an outright lie. I don't even think it's a misinterpretation.

Merle: But you feel he has the upper hand.

AliceAnn: Yeah, and I don't like that in the class. Department of Education said I should be in charge in there. But the other thing is, he's not going to do anything, he won't open his book, he's back to making spitballs all the time which I thought he'd gotten over. We'd worked on this very, very hard.

Much later in our conversation Amelia is talking about her relationship with a student in her class, a student who assaulted her and against whom she filed assault charges. AliceAnn makes reference to the conversation I have just documented. Again both she and Amelia are discussing what is best for the students and themselves. What creates the dilemma for AliceAnn is the place of curriculum in the classroom and her earlier reference to the Department of Education [now Alberta Learning] reinforces the importance of what is mandated for classrooms in Alberta.

Amelia: …in spite of the course that Stephen and I have taken, in spite of all of that, I still like him as a human being. I want good things for him and he knows that and that has probably caused his poor little mind to just be at a loss. He can't understand why I would charge him with assault for what he did and tell him he must come back in my room and I like him...they don't go together for him.

AliceAnn: They wouldn't go together for me.

Amelia: I think he honestly has that figured out now. I don't know that he could tell you about it but we're standing at the counter there as adversaries who've just come out of court and he comes over and says, how come you've got to fill papers out? And I said, well 'cause I have to Stephen, they said I've got to do this. He said, well what's it for and I said, I guess they pay me for mileage. He said, you got paid to do this! And I said, no I didn't get paid, I didn't know that they were going to cover my mileage, I only found this out this minute. But he's there talking with me and when I walked in [to court] he talked with me. He had a very hard time in class, was very angry to begin with. This is why I say [to AliceAnn] with your boy, let that run through for days. …for days he would not work in the room. He took his work and he left and he went to the office. He'd say his mom said he didn't have to work there and I just made him keep coming and finally he stayed.

AliceAnn: I just can't bear the waste, like if he could be happier and working somewhere else, there's 12 weeks of school, every single day.

Amelia: But I think there's a deeper learning than academic here, a more valuable learning than academic.

AliceAnn: It's not in the curriculum.

Amelia: Oh, of course not, no, but are we only going to teach curriculum?

AliceAnn: No, but not at the expense of the curriculum or something close.

Amelia: Well is he a student who's doing well?

AliceAnn: No.

Amelia: Is he doing poorly?

AliceAnn: Terrible.

Amelia: Well, so what's he going lose?

AliceAnn: Well he'll lose even more ground.

Amelia: So if you're a 30 and you end up a 27 but you've learned something about acceptance….

AliceAnn is expressing the importance of curriculum as ritual. Amelia is attempting to create a curricular space for exploring the question, who am I? Underlying their discussion is an assumption that it must be one way or the other. Must teachers choose between the work that AliceAnn and Amelia are doing? They are both contributing something valuable in the educational settings in which they work. Acknowledging both perspectives would create possibilities for teachers and students. Conceptualizing classrooms as liminal spaces would allow for a multiplicity of responses.

Amelia is no longer in the same teaching position. She did not leave of her own volition and I cannot help but wonder what part her classroom improvisations played in her contract not being renewed.

Perspective IV: Behaviour as ritual

The following story from my teaching experience (Kennedy, 1992) is one I have continued to ponder. It illustrates the embeddedness of school rituals of behaviour and the tension that is created when those rituals are challenged. On this day, the students and I chose to explore the liminal aspect of a particular behavioural ritual, class dismissal. Our exploration was spontaneous and arose out of our conversation over lunch. We were engaging in a playful and imaginative interchange that focussed on getting the students from the classroom to the playground. This lunch hour would have been long forgotten except that the rite that emerged from our exploration bumped up against the longstanding rites of school behaviour and my deference to the predominate rite was problematic for both myself and my students.

> …the boys were lingering on in the room [after lunch] and so I said bonus points for whoever can get out the door and they were in a good frame of mind and they were being quite jovial and Kenny went out the door and he wanted Adam out first rather than Miles so what he did was he stood with his legs wide apart in the door to prevent Miles from getting out before Adam. Miles who would normally just start crying or carrying on put on his coat and dived between Kenny's legs out into the hallway and of course Adam tumbled out after them and they were all out there laughing

> and carrying on. They'd had a wonderful time. I was sitting at my desk just watching. I had a laugh too…when another teacher, who I greatly respect,…came upon the scene and got mad at them. Oh I felt terrible, I just felt so torn and didn't know what to do so I went out in the hall and said something not nice to Miles about his behaviour and I realized I'd given in a the moment, you know, and I felt badly about it afterwards (Kennedy, 1992, p. 65).

I did apologize to Miles for what transpired but that was done after the fact. Knowing differently, as I did in this instance, did not translate into acting differently. School rituals of orderly exits and silence as a marker of acceptable student behaviour predominated. On this day that ritual served neither students nor teacher in any meaningful way and our attempt to write a different script was immediately quashed by another teacher and by my knowledge of and adherence to the predominant script.

Liminal space calls forth new scripts, improvisations that reflect a different way of being in the classroom. As a process-oriented activity it calls upon all members of the classroom to participate in the creation of new ways of being in the classroom. It is what my students and I were doing when we were 'caught' in the scripted ritual of how students behave in schools, more specifically, how students enter and exit classrooms. They were happily leaving the classroom; their exit from the classroom was scripted in the moment and made sense to them. They were doing what they needed to be doing and doing it in their own way. I was a part of the scripted scene too. I contributed to the chaotic nature of their exit with the enticement of bonus points. The process was working for all of us. It was I who stepped out of the liminal space and fell back upon well established rituals and once I did that there was a different telling of what had transpired. Camaraderie was now bad behaviour. Happiness and laughter were now noisy disorder. The students with whom I worked had an expertise in resisting the rituals of school and, in part, this led to their being labelled, behaviour disordered. Their bodies were sites of struggle, both figuratively and literally; it was all they had with which to resist. The success of their struggle was determined, in part, by the support or lack thereof of their teacher. I do not know the sense they made of what happened and the result of the partial support that I offered is unknown to me.

How often are classroom narratives smoothed to conform to the metanarratives of school? Is the story told one of a 'fait accompli' or one of ongoing questions and tensions with no resolution in sight? Reconceptualizing my understanding of a classroom as a liminal space would provide opportunities to stay with the story of our experience and to explore its ambiguities, contradictions and tensions. It would create a space to conceptualize classrooms as 'raced' places; places where race and racism are acknowledged and studied in all of their forms. Teachers and students need to write their own lines and eventually their own plays. They can do this by taking the time to live in the spaces between their own stories and the metanarratives of their culture. The individuals in each classroom need to be free to explore, to be in liminal space so that, over time, teacher and students, together, can write their own lines and eventually their own play.

Perspective V: My experience of liminal space

I was familiar with the idea of liminal space and my understanding of it serves as a framework for the development of liminality in this chapter. A friend and colleague, Kitty Stafford, introduced me to the idea of liminal space to help me make sense of a difficult time in my life. I experienced job loss and marriage breakdown and the accompanying mental, emotional, and physical anguish overwhelmed any sense of the 'present' in my life. Kitty helped me to understand differently and gradually I learned to "live in the question" (Maley, 1995), a place of both pain and possibility.

The poetry that follows was written during that time. The words were written onto the page as a way of making concrete what I experienced largely as a physical and emotional response to being in liminal space. I wanted to be present to the experience, to plumb its emotional depth rather than simply endure or deny the experience. It was a time in my life when I understood that "the mind doesn't really dwell in the brain but travels the whole body on caravans of hormone and enzyme…" (Ackerman, 1990, p. xix). What I experienced emotionally and sensually I have put into words.

Threshold Person[2]

I
Worldly possessions wrapped up within the cave-like structure of a moving truck
For a brief time I am held together by these cave walls, all that I have fitting together like puzzle pieces, snug and secure
It matters though that strangers' hands have created this image, when I enter the cave it feels foreign

Yesterday dismantled, a house almost empty
Loneliness, sadness, powerful memories that linger in this familiar yet strange place
No sense of a future in the remnants that surrounds me
Days no longer distinct, yesterday and tomorrow collapsing onto today

II
Attempts to work fail
I am in the way in my own house, how strange!
Workmen crawl over my space, paint trays, like traps, lie in wait on the floor

I go elsewhere
A library carrel
a smiling woman places her books beside me
Discomfort, how is personal space defined here?
Nothing is familiar anymore
No space is mine
I dwell in formlessness, reacting and responding to stimuli in new ways
Sensory overload
Tears flow
In need of anchoring, a place to be, I call a friend
hopeful of a visit
I'm on my way out, the response
Desperate, alone, tired, there is only one place to go
Once the car is started, tears flow

I drive without thinking, the familiarity of my destination enveloping me with a sense of place and purpose
I long for something now gone, a myth perhaps, yet I cling to its familiarity
Arriving at a house almost empty
Emotions disheveled
Tears flow

Head and heart ache
No past to return to, no future to attend to
Here and now, in the present, in the moment
Lungs bursting
Head throbbing
Skin cracking
Feet cold
Eyes blurring
Body fatigued
No structure to embrace me, I spiral into the abyss of the present
Free falling, nothing to stop the descent

III

Another time, another abyss
Running from it, going nowhere
Fragments of knowing confront me; see, feel, the fragments taunt
I steel myself, remaining numb
In time, I handle the fragments
Jagged edges cut and tear,
rough surfaces scratch and bruise
Too raw, emotions shredded
I leave the pain behind
Alone now, the abyss engulfs me
I have walked out of but not into
All at once I feel discord, harmony, fear, bravado, loneliness, connection, sadness, elation, despair, hope
My body reels and collapses from emotions run amok
Where am I? Who am I?

Standing on the other side of this experience, I look back and see my 'self' in liminal space without the benefit of a liminal rite. Driver (1991) says of divorce, "there is nothing but lawyers, courts, and papers…there is no ritual anyone can perform to do something about the couple's sense of failure and guilt, nor to initiate the children into their new, frightening situation" (p. 4). Even with support, the journey into uncharted territory was a lonely one. The possibilities that liminal space could provide for me were only there as long as I could stay the convoluted course of the journey. At times, I succumbed to the emotional and sensory overload. Looking back, there have been other times in my life when I entered liminal space. I wonder now what an understanding of liminality might have meant for my life/work during those times.

Perspective VI: Story

Liminality presents a story that is chaotic and non-linear. It is a story that begins without language because it is a story written on the body and experienced in physical and emotional dimensions. We may or may not put words around the experience. If we do, the words may be few and descriptive in nature so that the listener becomes aware of the physical/emotional/spiritual/moral dimensions of the experience. For example, Elizabeth said, "I was ok sitting there and I'm categorizing where it's supposed to fit in relationship to me and then we hear DP [displaced person] and I'm sitting right up" (11.18.97). She is putting words to a story that is written on her body. Her response to what she is hearing is a physical one, she repositions herself in the chair and then puts words to what has happened, "I'm sitting right up." She goes on to describe the pain that she experienced in being called a displaced person. This is an opportunity provided by liminal space, an opportunity to explore the dimensions of the experience, to stay with the story written on the body, to plumb its depths.

Being in liminal space means telling and living a story that may or may not have a beginning and a middle. There is no end to the story. It is fragmented and inconclusive, one that we are unaccustomed to hearing. Because it does not fit the story structures to which we are accustomed we usually do not 'hear' the individual who is telling the story or we superimpose stories to create a sense of familiarity and therefore avoid the pain of the story. Morton (1985) writes of a group of women where one woman is beginning to speak,

> She told how her life was no longer her own. She loved her children. She wanted them but they were there with her during every waking hour. No moment was her own. She wasn't herself any longer. One tear waited not for the next as she moved steadily, surely near the abyss. The pain became almost more than any of us could bear. I felt the women cluster closer and move with her down into deeper pain. …Suddenly the woman next to her turned to the woman on the other side of her and with her hand on her knee interrupted as she asked: "P, you have two children also. Do you ever feel this way? Tell us about it…." "Tell us about your experiences." …talk was passed around the circle. One told of her grandmother. Another of an aunt who died too late to hear her story. …I could not bear the pain of having the grace a woman pleaded for intercepted by women who could not go through the pain of hearing another into the depths of her own abyss where sound is born (p. 206).

In the process of superimposing their own stories onto the woman's emerging story, they negated her experience and, while they eliminated the pain of hearing her "into the depths of her own abyss where sound is born" (Morton, 1985, p. 206), they also eliminated the possibility of insight and growth. Morton's writing illustrates the point that the more familiar, complete stories are the ones that are told because they are the stories that people are comfortable hearing. The stories told by the women in Morton's quote are stories told in the past tense, there is little emotion in their telling so they are easier to listen to and because they are in the past there usually has been some resolution of whatever dilemma the story presented. They are the stories where everything works out in the end.

Where do teachers and students have the opportunity to be heard to sound? Who will hear the stories of chaos, disruption and anger? Who will hear the stories of failure? The question is not, who will tell those kinds of stories for the stories themselves abound. The question is, who will listen? Depth hearing (Morton, 1995) requires a suspension of the metanarrative, be it the metanarrative of women's lives or schooling so that a new story can emerge. Hearing an individual to his or her own speech requires an emotional investment. "We empower one another by hearing the other to speech. We empower the disinherited, the outsider, as we are able to hear them name in their own way their own oppression and suffering. In turn, we are empowered as we can put ourselves in a position to be heard by the disinherited…to speaking our own feeling of being caught and trapped" (Morton, 1985, p. 128).

My research study illustrates Morton's point, some white teachers are caught and trapped in "the unraced center of a racialized world" (Wray & Newitz, 1997, p. 3). In classrooms, it is usually the students who experience living in a racialized world and their experiences of that racialized world include their experiences at school. The notion of a racialized world is present in all classrooms and it can be avoided, denied or heard to speech. Conceptualizing classrooms as liminal spaces provides an opportunity for students and teachers to hear one another to the depths of the raced abyss. The chaos and confusion that might arise in such a place would be just that, chaos and confusion. It would not be a marker of the students' behaviour, nor would it be a marker of the teacher's ability to deliver curriculum, nor a marker of her classroom management techniques. Sometimes baffled and frightened, we could write our own lines and eventually our own plays, imagining new possibilities for life in a classroom and, indeed, for life. My conceptualization of classroom space sits on paper while there are classrooms inhabited by students who are not heard, students whose pain and anger is avoided, denied and, at worst, categorized as behavioural problems.

Another possibility that was briefly discussed by the teachers was a multicultural staff. Students would come to see different ways of being in relation and, hopefully, they would have opportunities to explore difference. While this possibility sometimes exists, it cannot be a reality as yet because the teaching profession is predominantly white. Amelia is the only one to work with a multicultural staff and she speaks of the openness and playfulness with which difference is addressed and the bonding amongst staff members that such an atmosphere creates. When asked if she thinks more about her whiteness she replied,

> I don't think so, I just am delighted that they can be so open that we can play with things, no one is offended, that we highly respect them. I love the openness of it. I don't think it makes me think more about my whiteness, if anything, it gives a high degree of satisfaction that my whiteness is not fencing them in. It's not that I don't think about it, I do, but in a very positive kind of way (03.09.98).

Acknowledging the racist responses of some students to the teachers at Amelia's school, we also acknowledged the possibilities that a multicultural staff might offer students when the teachers are in relation in the way that Amelia described. As AliceAnn said, "you're not getting your results today or tomorrow but in the future it'll give them a chance as adults to have freedom, to not be bound" (03.09.98).

Race and more specifically the construction of whiteness is something that educators can begin studying before they enter the classroom, it does not require the students' presence in order to begin. Entering classrooms with some understanding of their raced identities, teachers would be better able to accept the challenge from students that is implicit in the words, 'you're white.' This, then, becomes the work of teacher education, the preparation of pre-service teachers who can acknowledge and work with their raced identities.

Notes

[1] The reference to liminality is derived from Van Gennep's (1960) study of territorial passages and the historic "strip of neutral ground" (p. 17) that surrounded each European country. In other places, the neutral zones were "deserts, marshes, and most frequently virgin forests" (p. 18). The neutral zone became progressively smaller until it existed as a "simple stone, a beam, or a threshold…the door is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world" (p. 19).

[2] The title is taken from Heilbrun's (1999) book, *Women's Lives: The View From the Threshold* where she refers to those in liminality as 'threshold people.'

CHAPTER 9

Divergence / Difference in Teacher Education

This chapter situates possibilities for teacher education within two frameworks. The first framework sets out a brief overview of Canada as a racist country. It is necessary to make evident the racist nature of Canadian society because my experience of discussing racism varies from conversation to conversation. There are those who acknowledge racism in this country but sometimes I am told that Canada is not a racist country. The reasons for such a statement vary. I am told to focus on the African-American experience in the United States, that's racism and you don't find that in Canada. At other times I am told that Canada is a multicultural nation and that focus somehow ameliorates racism. In this case, multiculturalism becomes a panacea for those who do not wish to look closely at the racist nature of Canada. This framework serves to situate the students and teachers in a wider, societal framework.

The second framework draws on the literature of teacher education to both reinforce the first framework and acknowledge some of the difficulties in addressing racism in teacher education. The words of the research participants follow to reinforce these two frameworks and to contextualize what follows their words, possibilities for teacher education garnered from our research conversations.

Framework I: Racism in the Canadian context

> At the historical level Native and non-Native look at the world from opposed positions. Not only must they contend with personal differences in viewpoint, language, and experiences; not only must they contend with cultural differences in value, understandings of human relationships, and modes of communication; but they must contend with the world-shattering difference between the conquered and the conqueror, the exploited and the exploiter, the racist and the victims of racism. It is this historical difference

> of perspective that demands more than "learning about each others culture." It demands that we change the world (Hampton, 1993, p. 305).

Adams (1989, p. 14) describes Canada as having a "long history of deeply entrenched racism because the fur trade, operating on the basis of racism, lasted well over 200 years. ...White supremacy...became woven into Canadian institutions such as the church, the schools, and the courts, and it has remained the working ideology of these institutions." Boyko (1998) describes three racist incidents in Canada, incidents that occurred in 1907, 1933 and 1991 and states that "all were dismissed as aberrations in a normally peaceful, accommodating, egalitarian country. They were not aberrations. They were merely bubbles in the cauldron of racist hatred that has brewed in this country throughout its history" (p. 10). Boyko goes on to point out that, "the Native example is different. Native people did not come from elsewhere and thus could not be stopped through immigration laws and sent back.... Canada's Native people have survived an intentional, sustained, well-financed and cleverly executed program of cultural genocide perpetrated by the government of Canada" (p. 187). Like Sleeter (1995), he problematizes white understanding of First Nations history.

Codjoe's (1997) study of successful African-Canadian students in Alberta schools identified racist attitudes, that teachers' expectations of students were determined by social class and race or ethnicity. "...Black students express the belief that White teachers view them as academically inferior, discourage their interests in academic subjects, stream them into vocational and athletic activities, and respond to them less positively than to their White counterparts" (p. 187). Codjoe cites Banks and Banks (p. 188) to make the point that, "many teachers are unaware of the extent to which they embrace racist and sexist attitudes and behaviours that are institutionalized within society."

Framework II: Addressing racism in (teacher) education

Sergiovanni (1994) utilized a 1992 study of the Institute for Education and Transformation at the Claremont Graduate School to outline the deeper, more fundamental problems of schools. He pointed out that one of the fundamental problems in schools centered on the lack of relationship between students and teachers. Connected to this was the problem of race, culture, and class, differences that divided students and teachers.

In the 1992 study of teachers and students, students felt that teachers did not understand them nor like them and teachers reported they do not always understand students different from themselves. Without a sense of relationship, of connectedness, "fear, name calling, threats or incidents of violence, as well as a sense of depression and hopelessness exist…" (Sergiovanni, 1994, p. 19). He goes on to say that students have an "intense" interest in one another's culture but that they receive little information on the subject. If teachers do not understand students different from themselves then it is understandable that students would receive little information about the cultures that make up a classroom. It is important to note here that white teachers must also understand themselves as different than their students. The problem for teachers may be more aptly stated as a lack of understanding of students different than themselves and a lack of understanding of students' perceptions of teachers. Therefore, a teacher's work becomes that of examining the construction of her or his raced identity and its interface with the many raced identities that inhabit a classroom.

Teacher education must begin to bring to consciousness, make visible, the beliefs that underlie the multitude of decisions teachers make every day, decisions that affect the quality of their relationships in the classroom. Sleeter (1995) reinforces the importance of this point.

> I have come to realize that they [White preservice teachers and inservice teachers] bring a well-developed world view about the nature of society

> and inequality which is based on their life experiences and interpreted through dominant modes of thought. Their world view provides guidance as they make decisions about how and what to teach; and it serves as a filter as they interpret multicultural content (p. 17).

Without an examination of teachers' world views or filters, misunderstanding and anger remain an unexamined or ignored part of life in classrooms.

The raced identities of the teachers and students are also evaded by attributing classroom problems to other factors, factors beyond the control of classroom teachers. Gomez (1994) makes this point when she states,

> …new teachers working in inner cities, small towns, and rural areas were more likely to cite influences outside of school as challenging students' ability to learn than were their counterparts in suburbia. Teachers working with students of color and students from low-income families were also more likely to point to outside-of-school influences as detrimental to students' learning and achievement. Taken together, these responses from novice teachers indicate that early in their careers, many teachers locate problems of learning and achievement not as outcomes of teachers' beliefs about and behaviors towards children in school, but as consequences of children's outside-of-school lives–beyond the purview of teachers, schools and schooling (p. 321).

New teachers, then, are apt to reduce their understanding to a simplistic dichotomy, outside of school versus inside of school, a dichotomy that does not exist in reality but one that simplifies and makes accessible a response to difference. The language used in education today to discuss difference centres on 'at-risk for failure' and this language reinforces the point made by Gomez. The child is labelled, the child is/has the problem, not the school/teacher ((Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1995). The beliefs that underlie such labelling are problematic because they are

> implicitly racist, classist, sexist, and ableist, a 1990s version of the cultural deficit model which locates problems or "pathologies" in individuals, families, and communities rather than in institutional structures that create and maintain inequality (Lubeck & Garrett cited in Swadener & Lubeck, 1995, p. 3).

There is a focus in teacher education on multiculturalism to facilitate an understanding of difference. How white teachers understand multicultural education, however, has been problematized by King (1994) and Sleeter (1995). Schools celebrate diversity but what this means in practice, "particularly for teachers with little personal experience of diversity and limited understanding of inequity, is problematic" (King, 1994, p. 336). Multicultural teaching is often reduced to food festivals, holidays, folktales and cultural artifacts. This approach does not call into question the raced identity of the teacher; that conversation is avoided. Furthermore,

> White people in general find it very difficult to appreciate the impact of colonization and slavery on oppressed groups as well as Whites; they tend to prefer to regard everyone as descendents of immigrants. I believe Whites retreat from confronting the profound impact of conquest and slavery because doing so calls into question the legitimacy of the very foundation of much of White peoples' lives (Sleeter, 1995, p. 19).

Multiculturalism based on the immigrant experience not only excludes First Nations children, it denies their history.

Perspectives on racism: Research participants

The research participants sometimes contextualized what they were hearing/ seeing/feeling to make sense of the children's words and stories. The racist nature of Canadian society was referenced by the research participants through a description of the societal context in which they worked. Amelia said, in reference to herself and her students, "we are different. …they do have a different history, they do have a different place in Canada. They have been treated far differently than I've been treated. They have reasons why when they spew out, you're a white man that they spew it out" (11.18.97). Elizabeth commented, "the Native people are lucky, they have a long history, they know how to suffer the storms... There's a whole lot of them that are on drugs and are drunk but if you look in our society there's a lot of things that aren't quite right. They are a people with a history that they can draw from for strength, I think" (11.18.97). AliceAnn's understanding was based on her belief that, "I've always maintained that everybody is racist, you really are" (11.18.97). She understands colour blindness as a way of circumventing that fact. What is important to AliceAnn is the 'self' examination that must occur, "what you do with the information that you take in…feelings that are less than worthy." In reference to being called a stupid white person, I commented, "I understood it as a generalized attack. I mean, who are you in this situation? You're another white person, they're in here [the school] all the time…so I'm going to paint you with the same image I have of other white people. They've shared some of their experiences with me and they've experienced so much racism in their lives so why would I be any different?" (11.18.97). Throughout the research process our comments were expressions of our understanding of the historical and societal context in which our stories were/are situated.

Two of the research participants spoke to the context in which they worked. They spoke of the importance of support for teachers as they work with raced identities in the classroom. AliceAnn stated that, "…some situations are pretty awful for teachers. If you don't have the support and encouragement to try new things you could become dead. …I'm in a wonderful school situation, any of the things I want to try the principal says, go ahead. So I've been able to do pretty exciting [things]…" (05.11.98). This gives us a clearer understanding of the curricular adaptations she makes and her willingness to continually find new ways to bring together the students and the curriculum in a way that is meaningful for the students. Amelia spoke of working in a very isolated kind of way.

> I do interact with other classroom teachers but not like you would in another setting. And when we run into behavioural difficulties we're not given the kind of support I would like to see us given. So that kind of thing is not there for us and yet in the midst of this…kind of unhealthy setting all the way round our staff is amazing in terms of each other. I don't know that I would say supportive of each other but how united we are as the group who works there. We certainly don't have the kind of support I would like to see at our school, at all. So I operate, in a sense, in an isolated way (05.11.98).

The unity of which she speaks may be a personal rather than a professional unity, other staff members may value her as an individual and there is no expectation of moving beyond that to a professional unity. She lives a contradiction, feeling united with staff and yet working in an isolated way. In her classroom stories she describes the support of the administration when the situation in the classroom gets out of hand and the students will only respond to a higher authority, a gesture she describes as futile but necessary.

Children are sensitive to their place as 'other' in the classroom, a sense of 'other' they may experience in their day to day encounters with other students and do experience with white, classroom teachers. My research indicates that a focus on the raced identities of teachers is a starting point for a classroom focus on difference/divergence. Yet, where do teachers have the opportunity to tell their stories? Who listens to the difficult stories that teachers live and tell? How are these stories relived and retold? Where do preservice teachers have the opportunity to work with stories of teaching, to make connections between their own life stories and those of the storytellers? Acknowledging the life stories that we bring to our work as educators would initiate a focus on the raced identities of teachers.

Perspectives on racism: Preservice teachers

Hampton (1993, p. 265) states, "there is no question that one fundamental educational need of American Indians for the future is the training of Native persons as teachers and administrators." The reality is that First Nations children are largely taught by white teachers and a change in that demographic will come slowly. For First Nations children who live in urban communities the change in that demographic may not occur. As I mentioned in my opening letter, when I began a conversation on the topic of teaching First Nations children I was usually referred to someone from a First Nations community and the conversation was avoided. There is a parallel in teacher education; preservice teachers sometimes indicate that they have no intention of teaching in northern communities or on reserves and therefore the need to address issues relating to teaching First Nations children is of little significance to their program of studies. This plan is based on inaccurate assumptions. "About one-fifth of Aboriginal people, or 171, 000 lived in seven of the country's 25 census metropolitan areas in 1996–Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Saskatoon, Toronto, Calgary and Regina" (Statistics Canada, p. 5). In Edmonton, the total Aboriginal population in 1996 was 32,825 representing 3.8% of the city's total population. It is also dangerous to think that, because one is not working with First Nations children, it is not necessary to examine what it means to be a white teacher.

> Too often we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all. This results in a voluntary isolation, or false and treacherous connections. Either way, we do not develop tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative change within our lives. We speak not of human difference, but of human deviance (Lorde, 1984, p. 115-116).

From my experience, the idealism of preservice teachers sometimes precludes an understanding of difference as necessary to their work; it is not their classrooms that will experience the chaos, confusion and disorder that accompany the examination of difference/divergence. In their idealism they do not see that they, too, are situated in a larger cultural context and that systemic racism does not stop at their classroom doors. It is writ upon *all* the bodies that enter their rooms. The stories told by the participants are not easy stories to listen to but they do represent something of the reality of teaching. They are not stories where everything works out in the end. To make that the focus is to negate much of the work that teachers do. Stories are ongoing, understanding is situated in the retelling and reliving of the stories. Stories are "what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them" (Coles, 1989, p. 30).

Possibilities for teacher education

Students and teachers bring to the classroom their socially constructed, raced identities and while stories of difference/divergence, diversity/racism might be evaded in other places, in classrooms students express their feelings and sometimes name them. Schools also serve to shape identity and students respond to both the process and the content such that understandings of race are inextricably linked to school. How will we work with these stories? Will teachers tell their stories? How will they tell those stories? In classrooms that have become increasingly diverse many children experience difference, racial difference, and some of the children understand that experience as racism.

As I began the research study I acknowledged that, "I'm also interested in the process of how it is we begin to come together and share stories and I don't know what that's going to look like…how is it you bring into the classroom a discussion about race, class, gender and sexual identity…" (10. 28.97). The participants' contribution to the process cannot be overstated. Their willingness to journey with me created opportunities within the process itself that I could not have foreseen. That is the first lesson I learned about the process itself, it needs to be open-ended. There need to be opportunities for everyone to speak but more than that, there need to be opportunities for input into the process. There are two suggestions that the participants made.

> They began to talk about the makeup of our high school classes and we decided to bring our yearbooks to our next meeting to see just how 'white' our classes were then. Then one or the other mentioned religion. I spoke briefly about religion/spirituality as part of identity and how that had been mentioned at my proposal session. They both agreed that it was a part of who they are. Well at this point I mentioned that I had just turned off the tape recorder and let's have this discussion next time. We laughed about how we always do this and then I have no record of the conversation (Field notes, January 13, 1998).

The discussion on spirituality created, for me, a more holistic sense of 'self' for each of the participants. How each woman understood the presence or absence of spirituality in their lives came to be an important foundation of each one's teaching practice. The insights they provided by routing our conversation in this way were invaluable. Secondly, our evening reminiscing with our school yearbooks was both informative and fun. Our life stories on this occasion came to life in the pictures on the pages of our yearbooks. The stories of career paths, boyfriends, clubs, academics, and hairdos gave each one of us an opportunity to know more of each other. It also opened our eyes to that which we had not recognized at the time, the raced identities of our classmates and teachers.

Looking back, I realize that in our beginning it was important to let the conversation start where it needed to start. I knew what I wanted to explore but I didn't have the exploration mapped out and the open-ended nature of our meetings provided some difficult moments for me,

> The conversation in which we engage feels to me like it is all over the map, we are touching on all of these components of identity [race, class, gender, sexuality] and I think it is too early to narrow the conversation. At the same time it is clear that each woman knows me well enough not to be intimidated by the direction I might or might not be giving–it is seen as one more contribution to the conversation. Their overarching concern is whether or not I am getting what I need for my research (Field notes, November 18, 1997).

Our first conversation began with a discussion of story, "in the Solomon islands they have a verb, to story, and it just shows how important that activity is; you don't tell stories you get together and you story" and a discussion of responses to stories, "I find when people listen to [my stories] I react to some of their comments about them because they're only hearing a piece of the story and they don't have the full context…" (10.28.97). From here we moved to telling stories and one story led to another. Their thoughtfulness as they, too, constructed meaning of our conversations created multiple layers of meaning in the field texts. What they shared and the meaning they constructed as they connected the stories together created a base of shared meaning from which we could work. In retrospect I think that had I been more directive in the beginning I would have narrowed the conversation such that there would not have been a place for their input into the process. The time it took to 'set up' our discussions was time well spent. It provided a starting point from which we could work and created an opportunity for each participant to take part in mapping our journey.

Our discussion of spirituality exemplified strong differences amongst the participants. Each woman had an opportunity to speak, no one was cut off or dismissed but there were questions and more questions based on differing interpretations of the issues we discussed. This was also true of our conversation on how we did/did not acknowledge difference in our classrooms. Their passion for their work was evident. It was important to stay with the conversation, to allow the passion to emerge, to work with difference amongst ourselves.

As I look back on our conversations I am wondering now if the space in which we worked was a liminal space. We were working in an unfamiliar, partially formed space where familiar understandings were sometimes made unfamiliar. Out of a blending of our resonance and dissonance has come another way of thinking about teachers' identities and their interface with classroom practice.

When we began to share stories there was an atmosphere of mutual respect and a willingness to stay with the story, to understand its connections to life stories and to cultural/institutional narratives. Diversity/divergence are complex, multilayered concepts that often reside in the taken for granted of our experience. The convergence of our conversations, after the fact, with the guidelines set out in the journal article, "Honouring What They Say" (1995, p. 153), exemplifies the participants' willingness to talk about racism in order "to break higher education's long silence on racial issues." I see the guidelines exemplified in the following ways.

Communicating uncertainty was sometimes the way in which we began our conversations. Or one person's certainty was sometimes juxtapositioned with another's certainty and the dissonance between the two points of view would create a temporary uncertainty as we explored the various points of view. What mattered was the willingness of the participants to stay with the uncertainty that arose out of differing points of view, not to seek resolution but to be more cognizant of differing points of view. This relates to the second point, "listen without judging." In our conversations we listened and then responded. The purpose of the response was two-fold, to seek clarification and to set out a different point of view. This would continue until each participant had been fully heard and then the conversation would proceed, usually to a different topic. If silence was the response it was respected. When the response was an emotional one, that too was respected. Our differing viewpoints were taken seriously by each participant and the goal in our conversations was to understand the foundation upon which those viewpoints were based. Our conversation on spirituality exemplified these two points. While we didn't agree with one another's viewpoints we came to understand on what those viewpoints were based. As Amelia commented, "[my world] operates the way it operates but yours operates in an equally unique fashion and one is not lesser or greater and that always is so mind boggling. I find it's such a peaceful place to be in now. I'm not irritated by those differences…all those differences come together and make a more picturesque whole" (03.09.98).

The participants did not fear the label racist and understood the racist nature of our society. Their experience of racism, in part, ameliorated their fear of being labelled racist; it was as if they had travelled a full circle and were now able to stand outside of that circle and see it as a whole. The research participants did not equate 'minority' with 'problems.' They worked with a complex understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds. In their curricular work and in their conversations both in and out of school they worked with this complexity, refusing to work with more simplistic notions of us and them, right and wrong, minority and majority.

Story in teacher education

Connelly and Clandinin (1994, p. 158) state that, "stories are central to teacher education and to the improvement of schools." Both telling one's stories and listening to others' stories create the possibility that "the horizons of our knowing [will] shift and change as we awaken to new ways of 'seeing' our world, to different ways of seeing ourselves in relation to each other and to the world" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994, pp. 154-155). I commented at our first research meeting,

> I have worked with each one of you in some way and I know that when teachers try to figure out what's happening in their classroom and make meaning of it they're often telling a story of something that happened in

> their classroom to another colleague or to somebody outside the school setting…for me, using narrative is very powerful in teacher education because other people's narratives inform our own in some way. We could all read the same one and be informed differently. It also gives us a sense of the importance of our own narratives, our own stories…they help us to understand where we're headed, where we've been, where we are… (10.28.97).

The children in the participants' classrooms told stories and the teachers told stories and collectively those stories reveal some of the ways in which "racisms have inflected our/their identities" (Srivastava, 1997, p. 121). The challenge that the stories present is one of examining those racisms and then integrating that examination into the retelling and reliving of the stories.

Dialogue between and amongst those in relation is the basis for such storytelling. The elements of "reflective self-analysis" (Banks, 1997, p. 85), identification, examination, and reflection upon attitudes toward different ethnic, racial, gender, and social-class groups, arise out of the relational contexts of classrooms. Speaking from a historical perspective AliceAnn commented, "in any time that I know it's been someone else from another group who's helped. You just can't do it on your own. There has to be an element of bonding, co-operation, or else you don't have the vision" (04.06.98). The point she makes also relates to classrooms. The interdependence of all members of a classroom is built on bonding and co-operation and that sets a framework for examining racism and a movement toward change.

Implicit in the relational dimension of classrooms is the structural dimension of schools, embodied, taken for granted, and serving to both shape and limit our responses to one another. Who we are, the life stories out of which we claim an identity, along with who we are in the classroom, teacher and student, serve to set parameters on dialogue. It is through "reflective self-analysis" (Banks, 1997, p. 85) that we come to know something of our own perceptions of others. We need to take this a step further, into the classroom, because who we are in a school context, how we are in relation with others in the school, sets boundaries on our conversations. Some understanding of who we are as teacher and student is necessary to facilitate dialogue. It is not enough to know one's own perceptions of teacher and student for our knowing is steeped in societal metanarratives of teacher and student and those metanarratives act implicitly and explicitly to frame what we say and what we hear. The structure of schooling also works against such dialogue, from the scheduling of a school year to the development and implementation of curricula. While the task is daunting, it is elemental to our work in classrooms and elemental to building a just society.

The participants' stories provide exemplars, stories to share with preservice teachers as a way of to begin "reflective self-analysis" (Banks, 1997, p. 85), to begin exploring raced identities in classrooms. Paley's (1979, 1995, 1997) stories also set out exemplars for study. "My luggage had "liberal" ostentatiously plastered all over it, and I thought it unnecessary to see what was locked inside" (Paley, 1979, p. xiv). She examines identity and its place in classrooms by telling stories of her classroom. Many voices intermingle, teacher, students, colleagues and parents, to explore identity and its place in classrooms. The connections made with these stories create avenues for further study. Beginning this way gives students an opportunity to 'see' reflective self-analysis before moving into the same. A student in one of my college classes said to me, after reading Paley's (1995) book *Kwaanza and me: A teacher's story*, "I never thought about that before." She was referring to race relations in classrooms. In a discussion about the purpose of this book, Paley asks a colleague, "what do you think is the value of this book I'm writing?" The response, "It's all about dialogue, isn't it?… You are encouraging the dialogue, not necessarily the answers, but the dialogue" (p. 140).

Grappling with our culturally constructed identities as teachers and teacher educators (hooks, 1990, 1993; King, 1994; Wray & Newitz, 1997) is one of the ways we can use human difference as a springboard for creative change in classrooms. This work can begin in the classrooms of preservice teachers. Becoming aware of the fears, prejudices, apprehensions and expectations that influence our work will interrupt dysconscious racism (King, 1994, p. 338) and question white norms, white privilege and white superiority (McIntosh, 1989; Lynn, 1994). Addressing the responsibilities of teacher educators, Greene (1978, p. 54) refers to "a tendency to present an unexamined surface reality as 'natural,' fundamentally unquestionable…to overlook the *constructed* character of social reality." Her response to this tendency is "the creation of the kinds of conditions that make possible a critique of what is taken to be 'natural,' of the 'forms of illusion' in which persons feel so 'completely at home,' no matter how alienated they are or how repressed" (p. 54).

Thinking about the work that is required, we must also think about the nature of the space that is required to do that work and what this work means for those who inhabit that space. Like Srivastava (1997), hooks (1994) explains,

> to some extent, we all know that whenever we address in the classroom subjects that students are passionate about there is always a possibility of confrontation, forceful expression of ideas, or even conflict. In much of my writing about pedagogy, particularly in classroom settings with great diversity, I have talked about the need to examine critically the way we as teachers conceptualize what the space for learning should be like (p. 39).

Conceptualizing university classrooms as liminal spaces provides a space for such work and story provides a way of beginning. Working with(in) stories offers teachers and students an opportunity to move beyond the pale and imagine possibilities for working with raced identities in schools.

CHAPTER 10

A Reflective Turn

Moments of reflection, not always moments of comfort, to be sure, but moments of insight, moments when I understand the difference, for me, between then and now; then being 1990 when I started to ponder the question of raced identities and now being 2000. In moments of reflection, like Pratt (1991, p. 29), "I have a constant interior discussion with myself, questioning how I acknowledge the presence of another, what I know or don't know about them, and what how they acknowledge me means. It is an exhausting process, this moving from the experience of the 'unknowing majority' (as Maya Angelou has called it) into consciousness." I am learning a different way of looking at the world, a way that questions not what I see but rather how I see. And how do I see?

Thrice-Born

I am at the end of my writing, not the end of my work but the end of the writing, and my writing has provided a unique entry point into my experiences. They have become, at once, familiar and unfamiliar and I sometimes struggle to give voice to the juxtaposition of the familiar and the unfamiliar. It is as if am perpetually off balance, such that nothing is as it appears. I see differently. I do not fully understand what is happening but in reading Turner's introduction to Myerhoff's (1979) book, *Number Our Days*, I think I have found an explanation. Turner refers to Srinivas, an Indian anthropologist, who urged anthropologists to seek to be thrice-born. Turner explains thrice born.

> The first birth is our natal origin in a particular culture. The second is our move from this familiar to a far place to do fieldwork there. In a way this could be described as a familiarization of the exotic.... The third birth occurs when we have become comfortable within the other culture...and turn our gaze again toward our native land. We find that the familiar has become exoticized; we see it with new eyes (p. ix).

I am not an anthropologist. However, working with First Nations children was an introduction to another culture and while I cannot say I know that culture like an anthropologist might I do know that through my teaching and research I have learned something of that culture. And what I have learned, however rudimentary, has allowed me to turn my gaze back on the familiar and to see the everyday of my life with new eyes.

Being "thrice-born" turns the researcher's gaze to where it began, first birth, the researcher's particular culture. In my work, the students turned my gaze back to the culture of my first birth and that has continued through my writing and research. Turner writes that those who are "thrice-born" are "in the best position to become the 'reflexivity' of a culture" (Myerhoff, 1979, p. x).

Perhaps my body's imbalance is an acknowledgement of being "thrice-born," it is the physical manifestation of the collapsing barriers "between self and other, head and heart, conscious and unconscious, history and autobiography" of which Turner writes in his foreword to Myerhoff's (1979, p. ix) work. My work has created, for me, a new way of being in the world that expresses "the vital interdependence of these and other 'mighty opposites' " (Myerhoff 1979, p. ix). 'Mighty opposites' present themselves at the most unexpected of times.

Reflection I: In the parking lot

During the course of my research I moved from a bedroom community to a more central part of the city. I do not live in the city centre but I have easy access to it and regularly walk through the downtown core on my way to and from work. The easy access I have to the city's core also provides easy access for residents of the city's core to the neighbourhood in which I live. I have met numerous street people in my and their travels. I have been approached many times for spare change, walking on the street, at the grocery store and at the bus stop. I have watched individuals sort through my neighbour's garbage looking for bottles. Individuals with their grocery carts full of possessions are also a part of the streetscape. Whatever scenario may present itself, my reflections focus on the encounter.

It is a winter evening and I have just left the warmth of the grocery store and am busy loading the bags of groceries into the trunk of my car. Someone is approaching me on my right. Any spare change? I look up. He is of First Nations ancestry, I'm not sure of his age, dressed warmly like so many others that night. I cannot help wondering about him as a child. Who was his teacher in grade four? Did he have a sense of himself then as someone who would be asking for spare change in a parking lot on a cold, winter night? He attempts to load the groceries into my trunk but the task is nearly complete so he accompanies me as I return my cart, the conversation more of a banter now. Cart returned he is about to leave the parking lot but not before he offers me his mittens, beautiful mittens made from deer hide. Why is he offering them to me? I had no spare change. I did not take them, telling him that he needed the mittens for the months of cold that remained. I am surprised by the turn our conversation has taken. It feels personal. We part ways, he headed towards the street, I headed to another store in the strip mall, still wondering why he offered me the mittens. Inside two young men approach me, asking if that bum was bothering me, threatening to do him harm. I had seen them earlier walking through the parking lot, watching our conversation unfold. I was offended by their remarks. They did not know why I was approached, they were making an assumption based on skin colour. He could have been an individual who was a part of my life, a friend perhaps. In the moment, I did not know how to respond. Their arrogance was offensive and somewhat threatening, their assumptions racist. Standing in the aisle, where would I begin? What would I say to them to make them understand? I explained that I was not in any danger, that we had a conversation and went our separate ways. I wonder about my inability to be assertive, to speak directly to their assumptions. I arrive home exhausted. It is the feeling I have after each encounter with a street person, a mental fatigue that comes from fighting the stereotypes that exist in my head, looking instead for the person buried beneath the stereotypes. Sometimes I win the fight and feel exhilarated–like the time I was asked to dance at the bus station. It was my lopsided gait as I moved on ice and our mutual attempt to get around one another on the sidewalk that prompted his invitation to dance. We laughed together but didn't dance, now I wish we had. Like Pratt (1991) I wonder how he saw me, and how he saw me seeing him. Questions, always questions. Answers are sometimes found in relationships.

Reflection II: On the train

The events of last night still fresh in my mind, tears welling as I begin to write. I know I'm tired but there is more to it than that. Serendipity perhaps, a gift given when I most needed it. Heading home from work, wondering about my teaching practice–at the end of class I had given my students an instructor/course evaluation form. What sense do they make of the semester? What sense will I make of the sense they make of the semester? Hoping against hope that I get to the bus stop in time, missing the bus, being approached for spare change, panicking at the whereabouts of my house key, arriving at the train and panicking about the whereabouts of my wallet. Fatigue, doubt, panic, I am about to explode. I wonder what other people at the train station see when they look at me. Do I appear as I feel, fragmented and about to disintegrate? Does my body act as a billboard, my anxiety and agitation writ large for all to view? My effort to control this descent into mental rupture seems to be working. I decide to wait for the train because my need to get home is paramount. And then, in a moment of serendipity, I am lifted out of this emotional abyss.

Sitting on the train, I watch the other passengers board. A tall, young man looks familiar, can it be Dennis? He looks at me and looks again. He smiles and opens his arms. It is Dennis. I get up and walk towards him and we hug. Seated, we talk. He is an adult now and a father. I meet his son and his partner. His brother is with him, too. He introduces me as his grade four teacher, it has been nine years, almost to the day, since

Dennis and I first met. It has been a few years since we last spent time in conversation. We are happy to see one another and at the end of our journey exchange phone numbers so that we can once again keep in touch.

He is a student who was in my thoughts as I wrote this dissertation. Much of his story is now woven into mine. I learned and continue to learn from him. What matters is our presence to one another, the genuine regard we have for one another. We may walk different paths but our paths do intersect from time to time and those moments, inside and outside the classroom, have made a difference for me and for one of my students. The profundity of that difference in my life is made evident in this dissertation. And meeting Dennis last night reminds me that he and I are both learning along the way, learning that occurs in the unlikeliest of places.

Reflection III: At the gym

We are not responsible
for personal items
left in the facility

Tired of the statistical figures that flash on whatever machine I have chosen for a cardio-vascular workout, I look up. It is the same every time. I glance around the room from my perch on the second floor and soon my eyes rest upon the sign I have replicated above. To pass the time I ponder its meaning for my work. Personal items in the gym refers to paraphernalia such as a water bottle, ID card, keys or an article of clothing. According to the sign, the owners of said items are responsible for them.

Who is responsible for the personal items left in the classroom? Who is responsible for the pieces of self found under desks, inside lockers, at the back of cubbies, hanging from the ceiling, attached to the walls? What sense is made of those pieces? What pieces of self will the children hear in my words, behind my words? What pieces of self will the children see under my desk, in my gaze, packed in my lunch? Our responses to these personal items as well as the personal items themselves identify us to one another. As we engage in conversation, we are working towards a negotiated meaning of our personal items. It is in relationship that we take shared responsibility for personal items left in the facility.

Looking back

"If I had known what you were experiencing I could have helped you out." Amelia made this comment after reading a draft copy of the research text. It is a powerful statement for me because it speaks to her willingness, within the context of the school in which we were working, to engage in conversation on the topic of raced identities. I can only begin to imagine the possibilities that would have been available to both of us and to our students had we engaged in such a conversation. Simply stated, her statement serves as a premise for much of this work. She is acknowledging the importance of an individual's life stories and the importance of sharing those stories to create possibilities for retelling and reliving them.

Looking forward

"This would be useful for people to read because our classrooms are so multicultural now." Elizabeth's comment after reading a draft of the research text focusses on a point beyond the framework of the research as she identifies the need for such conversations in all classrooms because of the changing demographics in Canada. In one of our research conversations we explored the changing demographics in Canadian classrooms and what that meant for our own children and for ourselves.

In conclusion

It has been my privilege to work with the three teachers in this study. They have stayed a long and somewhat convoluted course to be with me as I complete this work. Much has happened in all of our lives as we journeyed together. Their commitment to this work has touched me in ways I find difficult to describe. They have provided both intellectual and emotional support to me over the years of our work together. Their responses to reading a draft of the research text affirmed for me the need for such work and I am grateful for their enthusiastic support that has, in large measure, fuelled the finishing of this work.

The last word belongs to the participants. For me, their words sum up my own feelings about the work we have done together. The words speak poignantly to the process in which we engaged and, in this instance, do not need identification. They represent something of all of our feelings about the work we have done together.

> *I found our last get-together phenomenal. I left here with so much to ponder and think about. It was an amazingly deep and broad and intimate discussion. Just to be a part of that kind of discussion is an honour, it's a privilege. So thank you…*

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